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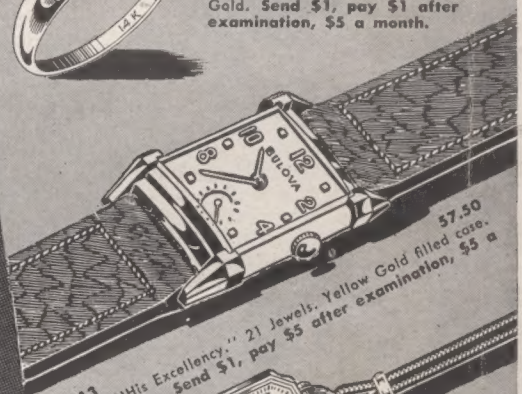

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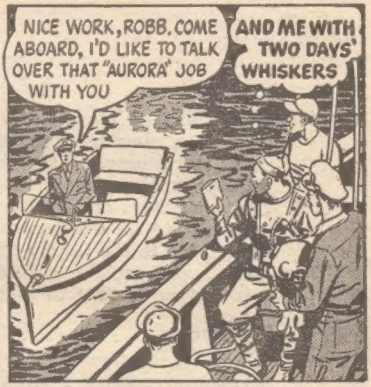

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Vol. 118. No. 5 for March, 1948 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Captain McCargo's Dilemma..... WILLIAM RATIGAN 54

It was a double dose of disaster—bereavement plus fatherhood—for the fabulous skipper of the schooner *Minong* when Prudence (beloved wife and indispensable member of McCargo's famous quartet) died giving birth to Thunder Bay, Jr. But there was no time for grieving—his howling offspring was not to be denied—and the manhunt for mother's milk was on! All of which led to the timely discovery of Hulda Roen Slogvig, answer to a hungry baby's prayer; the coronation of King James I of Beaver Island; and that mad foray known to history as the Battle of Paradise Bay.

Test of Power..... ROBERT J. McCAIG 80

Clint Rand, new supervisor of Northern Hydro, didn't have anything in particular against Pop Fremont. It was just that the old codger was getting along in years and 132,000 volts of power surging across a blizzard-bound mountain range hardly seemed the perfect patrol responsibility for a grizzled gaffer who'd never see sixty again. It was the old tale of youth against age; new ways for old, so Pop had to go—for there's no room for sentiment in the power business. What Rand didn't realize was that it takes heart-power as well as horse- to keep the circuits open—and Pop had plenty of the former when it came to a showdown.

SHORT STORIES

Louisville Pistoleer..... MERLE CONSTINER 36

Billie Sellew came to Cincinnati much against his better judgment. City ways were strange and dark and wild to a country nipper and Billie wanted no part of them. All he was interested in was selling his cartload of hickory chairs in the marketplace and getting back to the Pigeon Creek country. But it seemed that everyone was sprangling him up and bound and determined to tie him to town with their devious shenanigans. Well, if the only way out was by meeting a professional pistoleer on the duelling ground at dawn Billie guessed he could manage somehow. After all, wasn't he part Wyandot and trigger-quick himself? At least with his homemade clasp-knife that could cut milkweed or a city slicker's throat with equal facility.

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BE OUT ON MARCH 12TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Scrap Pile ..... COLEMAN MEYER 48

Complete with heavy jacket, burning-gloves, tools and all, little Johnny Riley probably wouldn't have tipped the scale at 120 pounds but he was an artist with a torch. After World War I we worked together steadily, demolishing skyscrapers, bridges, battleships—anything for scrap. Then suddenly the pendulum swung the other way and we found ourselves building ships instead of tearing 'em down and Johnny ran up against the high-pressure technologists who were running this new show. They knew their stuff all right—all that was in the manuals—but it took a guy like Johnny to get 'em out of their pinch (and believe me twenty tons of steel can pinch plenty!) and make them admit all the answers aren't in the book.

Of Blood and Brothers ..... F. R. BUCKLEY 118

Thousands of peasants armed with scythes and pitchforks can give even the stoutest soldier pause—particularly when he has explicit orders to refrain from charging or firing into their serried ranks. It was fortunate that Luigi Caradosso, Captain of the Guard, had wit and a flair for diplomacy as well as a strong right arm, or he might have found himself sickled to mincemeat by the yokel rabble.

The Bottom of the Barrel ..... JOHN PRESCOTT 125

We were just the greaseballs for *Haley's Comet*—Big Jim Cary and me—but we hated to see our boss pick an old goat like Stacey to drive his 18-foot, 85 MPH hunk of mahogany dynamite against Scud Johnson at Havre de Grace. That big mouth of Scud's won all his races for him before his foot ever touched the throttle so what chance did a dumbbell like Stacey have? Pardon me—did I say *dumb*?

SERIALS

Ghost-Mine Gold (1st of 4 parts) ..... STEVE FRAZEE 10

A fool's quest for fool's gold at the end of a non-existent rainbow—that's how every oldtimer in Sylvanite regarded young Rigdon Sadar's search. But he knew the yellow stuff was there, somewhere in the labyrinth of flooded tunnels and abandoned stopes under Sylvan Mountain—twenty-seven sacks of fabulously precious calaverite, highgraded from the workings fifty years before and never seen since. . . . And now Sadar had exactly seven days to find it—or live with the bloody finger of suspicion pointing at him for the rest of his life!

Restricted! (conclusion) ..... GEORGES SURDEZ 94

In which Bruce Kerrigan rips the last veil of mystery from Dr. Nordstrom's Sana, nicknamed "The End of the World," achieves his revenge on the smiling torturer, Charpiat—and returns to Paris to try to find the "rest and peace" he'd sought unsuccessfully in the Jura Mountains where "Rest in Peace" had come so perilously close to being his reward.

THE FACT STORY

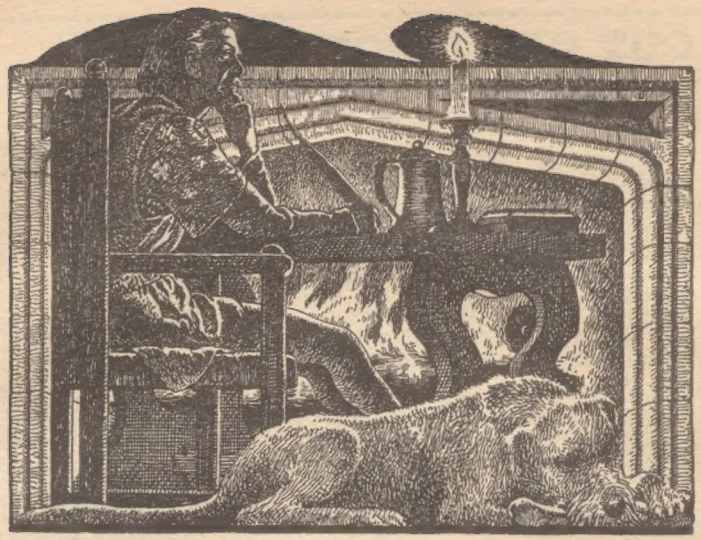
Highway to Hell ..... JULES ARCHER 72

When Harry Lasseter came from Central Australia with his amazing tale of $5,000,000,000 in gold—Repeat: five *billion* dollars—to be had for the taking, most people laughed at it as a gigantic hoax. But even as you read this, Aussie prospectors are still fossicking in the desert and backbush, gambling their lives away on a reef of gold-bearing quartz stretching from nowhere to nowhere in the baking land down under. Lasseter fired the imagination of an entire continent and paved a golden highway to hell with high hopes—and milestones of white skulls of dazzled adventurers.

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire ..... Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6
Ask Adventure ..... Information you can't get elsewhere 131
Ask Adventure Experts ..... The men who furnish it 136
Lost Trails ..... Where old paths cross 142
The Trail Ahead ..... News of next month's issue 141

Cover painted for Adventure *by Peter Stevens*
Kenneth S. White, Editor



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

THOUGH Luigi Caradosso sowed his wild and bloody oats, put away childish things and finally reached that ripe old estate when he knew better (even if he didn't always do so) more than three hundred years ago, we are continually amazed at the gallant swashbuckler's perennially modern outlook. With a *joie de vivre* surpassing the friskiest bobby-soxer's of today and a sane and healthy philosophy concerning what makes the wheels of the world turn even when sand is dribbled in the gear-box—a philosophy which makes sounder sense than the compounded mullings of a dozen UN delegations—our "sometime Captain of Duke Pietro's Guard" continues—b e t w e e n tavern brawls and councils of state in marble halls—to be the youngest man we know. Perhaps F. R. Buckley, who has acted for so many years as Luigi's Boswell, is responsible. Here's what he sends along to accompany the Caradosso tale (or fable, if you wish) which appears this month on page 118.

While "Of Blood and Brothers" may quite well be taken as showing what befell cinquecento gentlemen who didn't read their Emilia Posta, it contains also, I think, points of interest to friends of the History-Repeats-Itself Society. Repeating myself, for perhaps the hundredth time in the past twenty-five years, I may say that it's never my deliberate intention to comment on modern affairs in terms of the sixteenth century—in which, after thirty years of study, I'm perhaps more at home than in the present year of our Lord. It's rather that, reading over the manuscript, I'm sometimes seized by the feeling that I'm plagiarizing something — which something, on examination, turns out to be next week's newspaper.

In the present case: Facts by no means justify the popular ideal that cinquecento Italy was run by tyrants who gave the common people no say. The histories of (for instance) Siena, Perugia and, preeminently, Florence, show a steady succession of councils working with the succession of nobles. "Succession" is the important word; because as soon as any given council became skilled enough to accomplish anything, something befell it—either the nobles disbanded it, or the Pope disapproved, or the Emperor (Holy Roman), or the King of France. If it had been a Sixty, it would be reconstituted as a Forty, or if it had been a Twenty it would become a Four, and would have to start learning to legislate all over again from scratch.

The nobles were not such cynical hypocrites as the above might make them appear—they really did want the people to help legislate; but only for the reason that they saw they could thus get more out of them—just as

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

today we give in to cows' whims for the purpose of getting more milk. Just as, however, a cow whose whims led her to act like a racehorse would find herself pretty sternly disciplined, so did the various councils whenever they approached the idea that maybe noble-pleasing wasn't their prime reason for being. In other words, and as exemplified in recent and present dictatorships, the rulers encouraged "the fullest cooperation of the proletariat within the framework of the party doctrine." That's how it's stated nowadays. Cesare Borgia, for instance, didn't bother to state it; simply, when one of his provincial governors twisted one of Cesare's peasant-benefiting schemes to benefit the peasants instead of Cesare, Cesare had him beheaded, cut into quarters, and exhibited, together with the scaffold and bloody hatchet, to the peasants going to Mass on Christmas Day.

Captain Caradosso always reports objectively, and so has no doubts as to the motives of the young noble in "Of Blood and Brothers." Undoubtedly the young noble himself quite believed he took the action he did for the reasons he adduced. My own opinion is that he saw in the other young noble a a dangerous rival leader. And if his means of abolishing this rivalry seem to us rather brusque, we must in justice remember that the modern concentration camp had not yet been invented.

To sum up—I wonder whether the essential difference between a tyranny and a democracy is not that while in the former the people are encouraged to discuss means of attaining the objectives laid down for them, in the latter they are free to lay down the objectives for themselves?

STEVE FRAZEE, whose new story of the Colorado goldmines gets under way on page 10 this issue, appends the following to footnote his yarn and its background—

Nature had overlooked stocking with treasure the vug my father showed me in the Marshall Tunnel when I was seven. I was a little disappointed. Vugs, I told him, should be full of large chunks of pure gold, diamonds as big as alarm clocks, air rifles and stacks of fishing gear. He agreed and settled for a new fishing rod. So far, that is the only wealth I ever extracted from a vug.

Though Sylvanite is not Cripple Creek, Colorado, I was thinking of a famous vug there when writing the story. Popularly assumed to contain a million dollars' worth of gold, the cavity was cleaned out (when the time came) in a few hours, and approximately $350,000 in highgrade went its unromantic way to the smelter. While the wealth was underground it was protected precisely as in the story. An Irishman who was painfully honest was the only miner allowed to handle the ore in the vug.

Of course there was a little nibbling after the highgrade came out of the shaft. Nothing serious, however.

Muleskinner "Slick" James, whose nickname belied his straightforward, solid character, told me he netted forty bucks and twenty-five cents from the sweepings of his wagon box after hauling one load of the ore to the railroad. (That any part of the highgrade should have been transported unsacked is indicative of the careless spirit of early mining days in Colorado.) Slick returned the two bits to the assayer and told him to buy a drink, a gesture that was neither subtle nor sarcastic, even though Slick realized that he had received about half the value of the lunch bucket of sweepings.

Highgrading in rich camps was casual, giving the average miner no more twinge than an office worker feels when he helps himself to stationery, stamps and company time to write home to Aunt Nellie in Deep Fat, Michigan. A nervy miner with the inside pair of his digging pants tied around his ankles could make as much in a day highgrading as his wages for a month's work. Owners overlooked a great deal at first. Many of them were up from the armstrong end of hand tools themselves. Eventually the sad fact that the Rocky Mountains were not entirely solid gold intruded and mining began to assume an air of big business. In the end, tough dryroom checks and other measures slowed down the cotton-gloved boys.

Oldtimers from Cripple Creek still laugh about the quick-thinking miner who had only the brief interval it takes to whisk a cage from one level to another to do something about the filthy-rich plaster of talc he had molded around his leg. The cageful of men on their way up had been warned by a cooperative topman who had climbed down to the first level to report the shaft house full of bulls.

On reaching surface the highgrader barely had had time to get the plaster off his leg. Now it was in his hands. He went briskly to the superintendent and presented him with the highgrade. "This," the miner announced in a spirit of enthusiastic cooperation, "is the sort of stuff I'm working in!"

ONLY two recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month. John Prescott, who taps "The Bottom of the Barrel" for us on page 125, has piloted plenty of the hot-rod hydroplanes he writes about. He introduces himself and his story thuswise—

I was born in 1919 in Menominee, Michigan, on Green Bay, nearby to the Mesabi and Menominee ranges, and at the lower end of a once great lumber country. Some twenty-one years later found me graduating from Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, with a hearty interest in history and a pressing, if not realized, desire to write. There was a war to be considered first.

(Continued on page 138)

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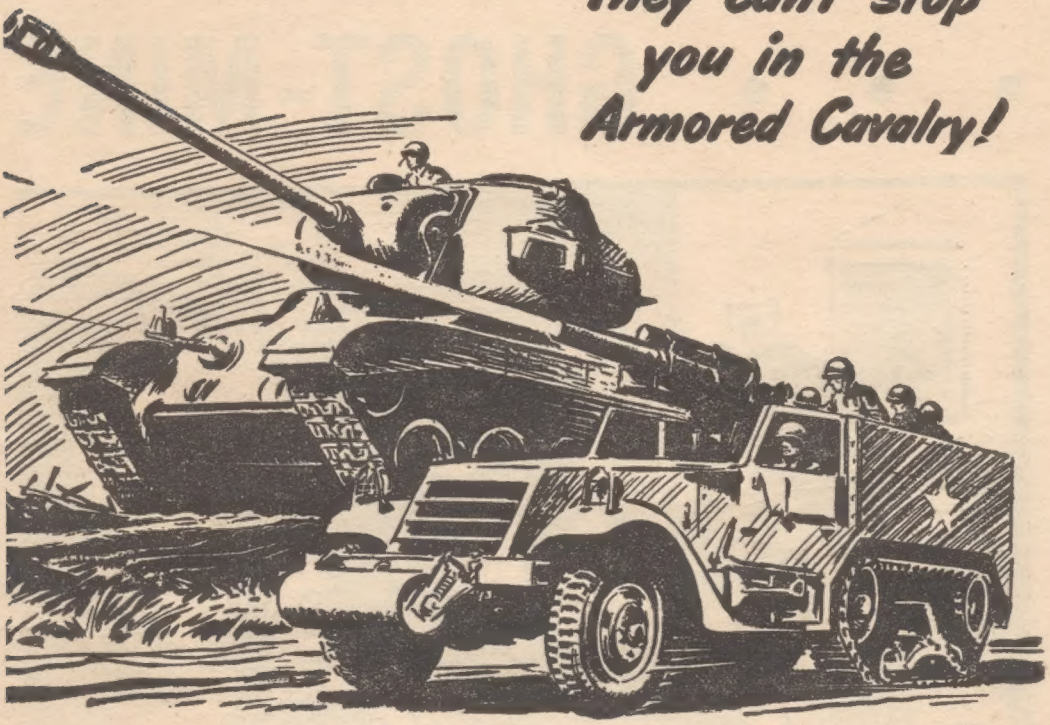

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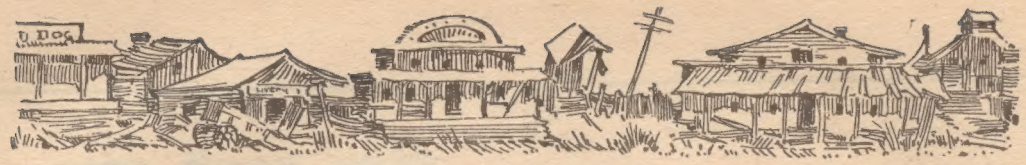
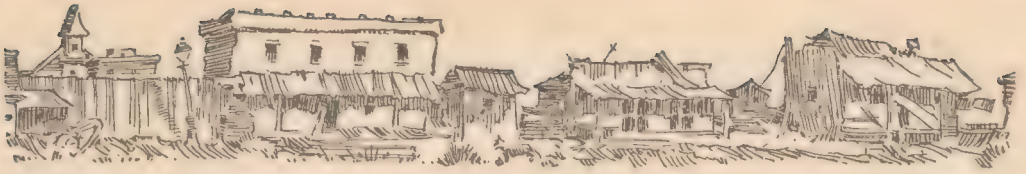


• • • GHOST-MINE

"Easy, son," the old man said. "Want to wreck the joint, lose your job and get jugged for a month?"

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER



GOLD

By STEVE FRAZEE

THE DESK clerk at the Big Stope Hotel wore a hardboiled miner's safety hat and a miserable patch of blond chin whiskers. His glance at the reversed register was fast and casual but he stumbled on the name. "How long will you be with us, Mr.—ah—Sadar?"

Rigdon Sadar's words were weighted evenly. "One week."

The clerk (Al Harris, according to the long pyramid of nameplate on the desk) reached sidewise for a record card, looking at the long-fingered, powerful hand that had signed the register. He threw a quick study on the lean, tanned face of the rangy man across the desk. About six-four, Harris estimated; right around two hundred and ten.

He began to write, wondering about the intentness he'd seen in Sadar's dark-blue eyes. "That's a fine beard, Mr. Sadar. Mind telling me how long it took?"

"Just a week," Sadar said. He might have been repeating the answer to the first question.

Sounds as if he had to flatten a mountain with a teaspoon in that time, Harris thought.

Sadar looked around the lobby, realizing for the first time how large the hotel must be. Three bulky columns down the center of the room gave a realistic effect of unpulled pillars in a mine stope. Everything in his life was tangled with mining. One week . . . Seven days that would telescope into each other with frightful speed. In that breath of time he had to find his way along an unblazed backtrail, tangled and overgrown for forty-five long years. He had one week—no, only six days, considering that the present one was almost gone—to find and lay before the world a fortune in stolen gold.

There it is, people, twenty-seven sacks of calaverite. Take it, kick it around, fight over it—anything! But see it and leave me alone from now on.

It's simple, Sadar thought. All I have to do is something that smart, determined men couldn't do in half a century. I find the gold, forget it, and a lot of other things are forgotten too. He thought of the incredulous smiles that would follow a public declaration that he intended to find one, maybe two, hundred thousand dollars' worth of highgrade and walk away from it without so much as a souvenir.

But that was just what he planned to do.

HIS life had been fouled with the taint of that calaverite long enough. Right now it was casting a nasty, sticky shadow on the forty thousand he had in clean money over the range in his home town. He needed that forty thousand to realize a mining dream he'd held for years, but he wasn't going to touch one cent of it until he had stilled all lies about its uncertain source.

He and Joe Tanner had planned their flourspar deal a long time ago. It had taken Tanner all the war years and a little longer to clear title to the ground, and now he wasn't going to wait on Sadar or anyone else longer than one week.

"Forget that old yarn about your grandfather stealing a pot of gold in Sylvanite," Tanner had said. "You saw him in Alaska during the war, and you know he made his dough up there mining, don't you? You're silly if you let ancient gossip get under your hide. I'm not waiting. It's taken five years for me to run down heirs and get that flourspar property cleared so we can go ahead without getting tangled up in lawsuits about payoff time. You're the guy that had the idea in the first place and I always figured on you for a partner, but I'm not sitting back and going blub-blub with my fingers across my lips while you suddenly get sensitive about where your dough came from. I say—"

"Look, Tanner, you spent a lot of time and money to make sure there won't be any future legal trouble about those claims. Don't you think I want my future unencumbered too? I fought a lie all my life. At times I was silly enough to think it would die of old age—but it won't. If I—"

"You let that wild yarn get under your hide!"

Tanner was a right guy and his argument might be reasonable—until Sadar looked back on a past that had included numberless fights at school; sly, bitter cracks every time he wore something new; fighting those who could be fought and turning away from those who couldn't be silenced by direct action. Tanner's mother hadn't turned gray before her time and become a near recluse.

"Sure! Didn't you know? His grandfather swiped a million bucks from a mine somewhere. Then he skipped to Alaska and left his little girl. All these years he's been sending back some of that stolen money to his daughter and her boy."

Considering how strongly the lie had colored Sadar's life, he still didn't know much more of the truth than those who repeated the story without knowing anything of the truth. His mother had been grimly reticent in his early years, trying to protect him, and tired of the whole affair when he grew old enough to understand.

He did know that twenty-seven sacks of incredibly rich gold ore had disappeared from a mine in Sylvanite forty-five years before and that his grandfather, Sam Rigdon, had left soon afterward for

Alaska, leaving his motherless baby daughter with relatives in a distant town.

Four years later Sam Rigdon began to send large sums of money from Alaska. The lie about its source leaped to life at once and never died. Sadar's mother bore the abuse during her childhood, and when she married, she and her husband refused to run away. Sadar was three when his father was killed in a mine accident. The mother stayed in the same town, trying to outlive the old story, but she underestimated the terrible velocity of a lie and paid for that error by becoming bitter.

Sadar wasn't bitter but he'd had enough.

A ski trooper in Alaska during the war, he had visited his grandfather. Maybe he hadn't been tactful in abruptly charging into the problem that had colored his life, not fully appreciating that old Sam Rigdon must have suffered greatly from the lie also. Grown gruff and touchy through years of self-imposed exile, old Sam bristled like an enraged moose and waved toward the worked-out diggings that had produced his fortune.

"You damned young pup!" he roared. "You're just like the rest of them idiots in the States who say I was a thief! What's the matter? Didn't I send you enough?"

Sadar's temper came off the bitts and he told his grandfather what he could do with his money. They raged at each other, their minds meeting in midair like the heavy clash of claymores, neither realizing how much alike they were, until old Sam said in a normal growl, "Shut up before I lose my temper." They got along a little better after that, but Rigdon refused to discuss the Sylvanite robbery.

"For years I soured my life over that," he said. "Now I've almost forgotten it. I'm fixed so I can blow smoke at mosquitoes and tell everyone to go to hell, so don't ask me to scrape at old sores."

Rigdon did produce settlement sheets for ore mined at his Alaskan property over a thirty-five year period. Sadar sent notarized copies back to his mother, confident that the papers would prove the source of his grandfather's wealth, unaware that documentary evidence is the puniest of dams before the powerful sweep of a popular lie.

After the war Sadar's mother pointed out a fact that had been growing in his mind for some time: nothing but the calaverite itself would wither the tendrils of suspicion that had fastened themselves into their lives. She told him that years before she had hired detectives to prove her father's innocence. Their report was honest: the back-trail was so cluttered with fallen years they could find nothing tangible to prove guilt or innocence. Approximately all they came up with was the popular belief held by veteran miners in Sylvanite that the gold was still somewhere underground.

TANNER was sympathetic but hard when Sadar announced his decision to go to Sylvanite. He promised to hold the partnership open for one week. "One week is all, Sadar. One year wouldn't be any better. I can guess how you feel, but you're riding at a windmill. For twenty or thirty years those mines have been dead. Damn it! Why don't you let people shake their tongues loose and come in while you got a chance?"

"I'm leaving today."

"You don't even know the details," Tanner protested.

"I'll find them in Sylvanite."

He'd moved fast after that, not even taking time to shave the beard he'd grown for the Mining Roundup in his home town. Tanner flew him to Eldorado, fifty miles down the river from Sylvanite. Not wanting to wait overnight for the bus, Sadar had started hitchhiking; his third ride brought him to the back door of the Big Stope in the cab of a farmer's truck loaded with manure and sacked potatoes.

One day was almost gone. He felt the need for haste, but still he couldn't go rushing about wildly. He kept staring at the pillars, suddenly realizing with a mild shock that they were composed of skillfully joined granite. A lot of money had gone into remodeling the Big Stope, according to the farmer who had given him the lift into Sylvanite. "Trying to make a walloping dude center of the old camp, Rouviere is," the farmer had said. "Old P.T.F., they call him, was a boy there when his uncle owned one of the rich mines. Rouviere's a millionaire on his own, though. Made it in real estate and construction in the East."

The clerk took in Sadar's broad back

and tanned neck. Jackets, slacks and open shirts weren't uncommon among Big Stope guests, but this fellow's appeared to have been used for wearing instead of display. Harris winked at two shock-headed bellhops in their early teens and leaned across the desk to look at Sadar's shoes. Though he didn't believe the advertisement he'd read about shoes revealing a man's character, it still wouldn't do any harm to have a look. The shoes were pretty big and dusty, but not bad. No, it was something in the set of the face, the purposeful way Sadar had walked across the lobby, an intentness in his dark blue eyes that had marked him as different at first glance.

Harris' hardboiled hat started to slip over his eyes. He pushed it back in place and grinned at the bellhops, who smiled wickedly. Each was wearing too-big pants held up with a single suspender.

Sadar watched people boiling in and out of the big dining room. The hotel would be a poor place to start on his quest; he'd have to get to circulating among the old-timers.

He turned. The bellhops reached for his bag at the same time, but one anticipated the other's move and shoved him backward. Harris stifled a grin. "Here, you two! The Boom Days spirit isn't supposed to go any farther than your clothes!"

"This guy looks like a good tip." The victor swung the bag to one side and tried too late to keep the vanquished from snapping his suspender.

Harris grinned at Sadar. "*They* are part of the manager's idea for atmosphere during Boom Days. The celebration starts at the end of this week," he explained.

Sadar grinned. "They'll do." He picked the victorious bellhop up by the seat of his pants and carried him, bag and all, toward the elevator.

Sadar's inside room was cooled and ventilated by a shaft outside the window. Water spilled in irregular slaps down the masonry, caused air to move the new shade, tapping the ends of the stick gently against the casing. That shaft, he decided, probably was original equipment. What with Sylvan Mountain outside and mine atmosphere inside, he wouldn't be likely to forget why he was here.

He lathered in a shower with brand-new plumbing, staring thoughtfully at a towel

Sadar picked up the bellhop, bag and all.

bearing the stope-like interior of the lobby in red stitching. "Free-spendin' manager up there," the farmer had said. "Between you and me, I sign a receipt for a little more than I actually get paid, but I get enough anyway."

He considered shaving. The beard was a silly thing and itched a little under his chin. But it wouldn't be out of place with a celebration coming up, and it barely might prevent him from being recognized by some of the skiing crowd he knew. Even in summer one of them might be hanging around the place.

SADAR left the room and walked down, running one hand along the solid smoothness of dully gleaming mahogany. It felt good under his hand. Strong as a well-placed mine timber.

An orange-haired, buxom woman was standing near the bottom newel post. "Splendid, isn't it?" she asked. "To think that all this beautiful wood was *painted* over when Mr. Rouviere bought the hotel!"

Sadar sized her up. The sort of woman who asked a question, smiled brightly while you tried to answer, and then speared in with her own answer or a story about her cousin before you had a chance to get organized.

He went by fast, clicking his tongue. "Horrible thing! Awful!"

He paused before a mural that covered half of one long wall. Obviously reconstructed from a panoramic photograph, it gave a sweeping view of Sylvan Mountain and the mines in days long dead. Spencerian calligraphy on vellum behind glass in a gold leaf frame read:

> No raw boom camp of crude shacks and tents was Sylvanite—but at its height a prosperous community where 10,000 owned homes of stable construction. At change of shifts, against the black and silver of night, the lights of 5,000 miners made a glowing serpentine trail on Sylvan Mountain.
>
> From the more than 500 miles of workings, abandoned since 1918, came fortunes that . . .

Five hundred miles of drifts and stopes and raises. Thirty years that the mountain had been crumbling inside. Spongy timbers mushroomed on the ends from terrible pressure of creeping ground . . . acres of darkness below millions of tons of granite and quartzite . . .

A fine job you have, Sadar. One day gone and you aren't even started.

At the desk he asked: "Where do sensible citizens eat?"

The clerk had an unlighted miner's lamp on his hat now and the weight seemed to be troubling him. He adjusted the hat and muttered: "Damn this Boom Days buildup." He glanced at the dining room. "Why—" he grinned —"we eat at home."

Harris and Sadar grinned at each other like conspirators, Sadar realizing that he had found a liking for the desk clerk from the very first. He wondered how much Harris could tell him of Sam Rigdon's history in Sylvanite. The clerk might know the story, but he wasn't any older than Sadar, and his tale would be second-hand. No, the thing to do was get out among old-timers and then try to sort facts out of some of the damnedest lies a man could hear.

"Our chow's good, but the price is strictly tourist," Harris said. "The Windlass Bucket, up the street four blocks, is the best I know."

"Thanks." Sadar turned to go and had to stop quickly to keep from colliding with a short, quick-striding man approaching the desk.

The man smiled, a full-blossomed action that ended as quickly as it began. "Sorry," he said, and went on to the desk. He was middle-aged, vigorously bald, and appeared to be hard-bodied and active. Slightly protuberant mild blue eyes belied the harsh expression of a square jaw and strong, hard lips. The lower half of the man's face gave Sadar the impression of a tough-tempered striking hammer.

"Hello, Mr. Rouviere," Harris said. "How was your archery today?"

"Good form, poor score, Al."

Near one of the granite pillars Sadar rested his hands on the edges of heavy glass that covered a mineral display and tried to look interested in the specimens.

Rouviere was telling Harris that a bale of hay was no good to eat, even if you hit it dead center with an arrow. Sadar alternated between looking at minerals he recognized unconsciously and watching Rouviere. There was a man who probably could give him a great deal of straight dope about Sam Rigdon and the robbery. Rouviere had lived in Sylvanite years before his uncle had owned a mine . . . For a moment Sadar considered going directly to the millionaire and requesting an interview to tell his problem.

He watched Rouviere's face as the man turned his head to speak to a passing woman. The smile snapped on and off relieving for just a wink the brutal flatness of the man's mouth and jaw.

Sadar discarded his thought. Who in his right mind would credit Sadar's real motive in wanting to find the calaverite?

"What do you know! Maybe old Rigdon didn't get away with all that gold after all. His grandson's in town looking for it. Of course, old Rigdon didn't tell him where to look!"

He scowled at a specimen in cotton: *Calaverite From the Hibernian Mine.* All he needed was twenty-seven sacks of that. He allowed himself the cold-blooded thought that perhaps the highgrade was long-gone and that he was on a forlorn mission. It wasn't the first time he'd faced that possibility. Yet he had to go ahead.

AT THE desk the plump woman who abhorred painted mahogany (Mrs. Mahogany, he dubbed her from then on) was surrounding Rouviere. "You know," she

said, "sometimes I don't believe people appreciate what you're doing here, Mr. Rouviere. So often, in projects of this sort, the beautiful atmosphere of the past is ruined by some utterly incongruous modern atrocity!"

Like a shower room, Sadar thought. She ought to be forced to bathe in a wooden tub with water heated by hot rocks.

The woman began to warm up. Rouviere's smile winked on and off politely and he started to edge away.

"Now, if you could revive the former glory of the mines!" All Mrs. Mahogany needed to complete a heroic stance was a pick.

She's been moonstruck by the blurb on that mural, Sadar thought.

"That would be a poor investment, I'm afraid," Rouviere said.

He was looking straight at Sadar, but even as Sadar stared back in an effort to determine whether the millionaire's glance was related to his words, Rouviere turned away, punched a polite excuse into the uncanny interval of silence while Mrs. Mahogany was switching fuel tanks, and made his escape.

Al was terribly busy with some cards. Mrs. Mahogany eyed Sadar thoughtfully. He went toward the street doors rapidly.

Relative distance assuring escape if pursued, he stopped in the main entrance to look at a mining display. Four sets of posts and caps gave the wide doors the appearance of a mine portal. The framing, he noticed carefully, was strictly expert. Rusty picks and shovels leaned against the lagging; pieces of rock were scattered along the walls; a mine car sat on false rails just inside the lobby. He pushed gently against the box. It didn't move. He saw then that some thoughtful soul had spot-welded the wheels to the axles. He grinned. A good thing, too, or those outlaw bellhops would be using the car to run down fat women in the lobby.

Both bellhops were outside, squatted by a dozen or more carbide lamps on the sidewalk. A slim girl wearing silver-inlaid cowboy boots was standing on a chromium bar stool, hanging lamps on the spokes of a wagon wheel suspended from the marquee. Another girl in western gear was handing the lamps up. She smiled at Sadar.

"Look, Jackie, the Beard!"

The girl on the stool looked down and smiled. She wore tailored dungarees and a dark shirt that accentuated the blue of her eyes. Her hair was the color of a setter standing in sunshine on a bright October day. She was, Sadar decided instantly, an unusually good-looking girl.

"Tell me," she said, "do you sleep with that beard under the covers or on top?"

"Come to think of it—" Sadar said.

"He wears a snood on it," the second girl said.

"I'll bet he keeps it in a traction splint," Jackie said.

"This lousy damn gasket leaks!" one of the shock-headed bellhops grumbled.

Jackie's eyes lit with laughter. "Such language, Terry!" She looked at Sadar. "Give the boys a hand, Beard. Terry and Gary, born under the sign of a bull in a china closet. Stout lads for atmosphere, though, about Boom Days time. Little do the guests know that Terry and Gary aren't acting!"

Sadar showed the bellhops the basic principle of hooking tanks to side pins before clamping the lamps together.

"That's easy," Terry or Gary grinned. "You a miner, chum?"

"Sort of," Sadar said. He nodded toward the doors. "Who framed the timbers?"

"Old Deedee done that," one of the boys said.

"Deedee Ducray *did* that, Gary," Jackie said.

Sadar tucked the name away. A miner . . . old . . . Still, anybody past eighteen was old to these kids.

Jackie rested one hand on his shoulder and jumped lightly to the walk. "Thanks," she said. "And don't mind our feeble cracks about your beard."

He grinned. "You're welcome."

He was turning to go when a tall, wide-chested man approximately his own age stepped from the doorway. The fellow wore a short reddish beard, so thick each hair seemed to be clinched around another. The man scowled at Terry and Gary, who were tugging for the dubious honor of carrying the bar stool. He measured Sadar with cold disapproval, then smiled at Jackie. His voice was smooth and careless when he said, "Did you forget you were going to have dinner with me, Jackie?"

"No, Biff," the girl said, in the tone of one humoring an impatient child. She smiled at Sadar. "Thanks again."

The red-bearded man gave Sadar a careless, insolent look. Sadar weighed him, decided he didn't like him. He walked past the bellhops, who by now had compromised by sharing the chair-carrying task, and started up the street.

Biff's voice followed him. "That fellow hitchhiked here on a load of fertilizer."

Sadar looked back. The girls were going past Biff, who gave Sadar one last disapproving glance and followed them into the hotel.

To hell with him, Sadar thought.

"Tell me," she said, "do you sleep with that beard under the covers or on top?"

CHAPTER II

DUDE BAIT

THE PRESENT was thrusting up through the past in Sylvanite. Glass brick and travertine flashing of a gaudy bar front stood between two rotting, sway-backed buildings where curled sheeting was skeleton gray beside broken, dust-dulled windows. Through gaps made by wrecked buildings he looked toward a back street and saw the stucco walls of small residences sitting between huge, windowless mansions.

Over the carved top of Delmonico's Restaurant a wide clearing through the aspens on Sylvan Mountain marked a ski course that went up and up in sweeping curves, finally disappearing over the rounded summit. Beyond were blue-gray peaks, clean-limned against the evening sky.

Yesterday was lush but today was lusty.

He stopped before an old man in khaki coveralls in front of a garage. Clean-shaved and sharp-eyed, the old fellow was sitting on a seat made of automobile cushions under a sign that said, *Ralston Motors, Inc.* He shifted as far as upthrust coil springs mushrooming in broken upholstery would allow and eyed Sadar with a squint that was either fierce or questioning.

The old man shook his head briskly when Sadar offered a cigarette, squinted with obvious disapproval at the tall man's beard while Sadar was lighting up. The match *whirred* into the street and died.

"Where do you eat around here?" Sadar asked.

"Home." Sadar's beard was still getting a zero point zero inspection. "Couldn't eat there, I'd leave town."

"That bad, eh?" Sadar glanced down the street. "Too bad Delmonico's isn't still running. That was really a restaurant, I hear!"

The old man relaxed a little. "I mean it was!" He began a fish-by-bird account of ancient menus, ending with the irrelevant challenge: "You ain't growing that beard for this here celebration, are you?"

Sadar said he wasn't.

Fifteen minutes later, after the old man had discovered that Sadar had been in Alaska; that Dutch Harbor, where the old-

timer's grandson had been during the war, was not exactly on the Alaskan coast, that Sadar knew a stope wrench from a jim crow, his reticence dissolved entirely and he offered half of his seat among the steel mushrooms. Sadar declined.

"Mines completely dead?" he asked.

The old man spring-boarded off in the wrong direction. "Yep! Everything here is dude bait now. Ski course, paths to ride horses on—all that junk." He pushed a rusty spring, watched it pop up again. "Oh, that stuff brings in money, all right, but we got along all right enough since the mines quit for good thirty years ago. We got a hospital, a damn good grade school, fine county court house, our own power plant and a lot of other things. We ain't asked nobody for nothing!"

The old man spat explosively.

"Then along comes this Reeves with Rouviere's money and gets everything stirred up. He gets a property boom started, gets folks to fighting each other bidding for lots and old buildings that nobody wanted a-tall a few years ago. Then he tells people what they ought to build and what to do and that they have to grow beards for this sucker celebration he cooked up. Why, hell . . . !"

An automobile stopped before the pumps and the driver yelled, "Hey, Charley! Where's your beard?"

Old Charley grinned and cursed good-naturedly and went toward the pumps. He looked back over his shoulder at Sadar. "Wait a minute, son, and I'll tell you some more."

"I'll see you later," Sadar said. The way Charley had been steamed up, he probably wouldn't be able to talk about anything besides the local feud for some time.

Two blocks up the street Sadar saw red neon flicker, then steady into an outline which could pass for a windlass bucket. A huge sign on top the Big Stope was lighted, but only the bright, spouting flames of the carbide lamps gave illumination at the entrance. Two cars eased to the curb near the ball of light. Terry and Gary came running from the hotel.

Early dusk didn't soften ruins that far outnumbered inhabitable structures he passed as he walked on. Night's pickets made sagging buildings more forlorn, more weary in their slow collapse. The new would win; the old was doomed, but let ancient ghosts die without interference. Let them crumble comfortably, he thought. Still, Rouviere had his side. The past was dead, and if the natives fought each other in their greed over the new, that was because they were human beings, not because Rouviere inspired them to do so.

He cut his speculations short. What Rouviere and his man Reeves were doing to the town was none of Sadar's problem, though he might have to listen to a lot of talk about their activities in the course of extracting information.

Under a fluted lamp post he drank icy water from a green iron Mike in front of a drugstore where the curving legs of iron tables and chairs showed through dusty windows. Overflow from the fountain bubbled to a mossy basin for dogs at the base of the pedestal. His eyes narrowed when he read the small bronze marker on the fountain: *Presented to the City of Sylvanite by Mrs. Samuel T. Rigdon.*

A bald man in white druggist's jacket came from the store and sat down on an iron bench near the door. "Nice evening!" he hailed. "Up for the celebration?"

"In a way, yes." Sadar sat down beside the druggist. "Haven't seen a fountain like that for years. Who was the woman who gave it?"

"Oh, some civic-minded old battle-axe, I suppose."

Sadar edged around this unpromising start. "I've heard this used to be quite a town—rich mines, million-dollar robberies and so forth."

"Million-dollar robbery?" The druggist considered. "Oh! That old vug story. I heard something about that when I first came here ten years ago, but you know how those tales are—hogwash and moonshine."

"I suppose." Ten-year resident, eh? Sadar lingered only long enough to confirm Harris' plug for the Windlass Bucket. The druggist added that Bob Reeves, Rouviere's manager, owned the Windlass Bucket.

STAGY, resplendent western garb mingled with and made drab the working clothes of conservative citizens and the sports garments of tourists in the noisy, crowded Windlass Bucket. To the

mayhem and arson of a multi-colored juke box two young couples were cracking joints in a weird dance. There was one vacant stool at the half horseshoe bar. Sadar took it. On his right was a moist-eyed woman whose caboose was putting a dangerous strain on pale green slacks; on his left a morose, bitter-looking man about his own age was doodling with beer rings.

The woman on Sadar's right studied him covertly, then leaned to whisper to a chubby, bright-eyed girl companion. Both giggled and peered sidewise at Sadar. He turned to the sour lad on his left.

Painfully clean-shaved, the fellow was hunched forward in a black leather jacket, absorbed with stale beer and a forefinger that showed the stubborn tracery of frequent dipping in grease and oil.

Sadar remembered the expert timber framing at the Big Stope. "Do you know a man named Deedee—"

Something red-hot burned his cheek. He jerked toward the moist-eyed woman on his right. She was giggling moistly. Clamped in small pliers were several brown whiskers from Sadar's face. She extracted one carefully with cardinal-enameled nails and held it toward the light. "Excellent, very excellent specimen, Myra," she told her companion.

"What the hell?" Sadar said.

Chubby Myra mined into a red plastic purse, producing a pencil and a sheet of paper that held several other hairs under Scotch tape. She leaned behind her companion to speak to Sadar. "Collecting. We bet a jeep against two saddle horses that we could get more whiskers than two of our friends."

"It must have been a fine jeep," Sadar growled, feeling his smarting cheek.

Myra's wide mouth was struggling hard to keep from smiling. "Name, please? Each and every specimen must be labeled in case of a spot check by the contestants."

The woman was giggling—clamped in small pliers were several brown whiskers from Sadar's face.

"Cornelius J. Rook." Sadar glanced defensively around the room. Everyone seemed to be grinning except the bitter man on his left and a tall, elderly man in a new denim jumper. The latter had one hand on a small glass of beer and was standing where the curving bar met the wall. He held Sadar's gaze a moment so fixedly that Sadar got the impression of startled intentness in the old man's eyes.

"C.J. Spook," Myra said slowly as she wrote. She leaned behind her companion and grinned at Sadar, an expression that was as impudent and friendly as her snub nose. "To show there's no hard feelings, I'll buy a drink."

"Keep the whiskers, skip the drink."

"He's a grump, Myra," the second woman said. "Fine whisker grower, but a grump. C.J. Spook, Esquire, Grump."

The man on Sadar's left didn't lift his eyes from doodling. "Damn fool women!" he said in a harsh voice.

Sadar turned to him. "I can understand now why sensible people around here don't wear beards."

"Women grabbing whiskers isn't the reason. This whole beard business is part of a buildup for the Boom Days racket!" The man's voice was savage, unnecessarily loud.

A youthful bartender wearing luxuriant black burnside whiskers started to take Sadar's order, digressed to give the bitter-faced man an angry look. "You tell 'em, Ralston! Everything Reeves does is a racket—since his boss turned you down on the Hibernian deal. But you don't get sore enough to quit robbing the tourists he brings in at that knocked-out joint you call a garage!"

"That's my business!" Ralston's face went the color of dirty gun metal. "You stick to mixing three cents' worth of whiskey in six-bit drinks!"

The bartender laughed, winked at Sadar and ignored Ralston, who gulped at his beer and glared at the bartender. Ralston's green eyes didn't leave the youth when he shook his head curtly at Sadar's offer to buy.

The Hibernian . . . one of the calaverite specimens Sadar had seen in the Big Stope had come from the Hibernian. He gave his order and the bartender left.

"How long since you worked the Hibernian?" Sadar asked.

"I never did work it," Ralston said curtly. He looked contemptuously at Sadar's beard. "I see you fell in line with the edict the feudal lord got the mayor to sign."

"How's that?"

"Let your whiskers grow for Boom Days or get tossed in the clink and fined a couple of bucks!" Ralston's harsh voice filled the room in the interval while the juke box gasped for air and changed records. "What a racket! Where does the money go?"

A heavy-set, flushed youth with a fiery red beard risked a fall to lean far out on his stool and look at Ralston. "The sore-head grease jockey is wound up again!"

The juke box buckled down to murder and brimstone.

"I'm not bowing and scraping before the feudal lord, anyway!" Ralston shouted. "Rouviere and his stooge Reeves. They're even trying to call the ski course Rouviere Run!" Ralston's green eyes had an odd transparent look; brown hair fell across his forehead; lines running down from the corners of his nostrils deepened.

HE WORKS up quite a lather, Sadar thought. He generates enough steam to blow his top when the pressure gets too heavy. Sadar saw the old man in the denim jumper watching Ralston quietly.

"Who built the damn ski course in the first place?" Ralston demanded.

The woman next to Sadar said, "You—with your little red hatchet, Jackie Boy." In an undertone Myra warned the woman, "Don't needle him!"

Ralston's face twisted. "By God! I helped the sportsmen's club build most of that course six years before Rouviere came slumming in the old home town and 'discovered' what wonderful skiing country this is!"

"Stow that stuff, loudmouth!" The lad with the fire-red beard almost fell off his stool.

"When I get ready I will!" Ralston shouted.

"I'll help you get ready!" The beefy youth lurched off his stool and came staggering along the bar. Two women in cowgirl outfits tried to stop him.

"Outside with it!" a bartender shouted.

"Let him come on!" Ralston yelled.

Beautiful luck, Sadar thought. After rolling snake-eyes twice I finally find a guy who might be wanting to re-open an old mine for the same reason I'm here, but he has to be a stinker and start a brawl. He ought to lose teeth for being offensive, but . . .

There was something resigned and pitiful in the fear that underlaid Ralston's defiance and anger. Something that said, "This is an old story, but I can't help it."

Sadar got off his seat and waited for the oncoming drunk, who was momentarily delayed by having fallen sidewise between two seated customers. He recovered, pushing himself from the bar so forcefully he almost fell the other way. He flung aside the two women trying to stop him and came on.

The denim-covered arm that shot toward the drunken youth's shoulder had a big hand on the end of it, a hand that stopped the lad so abruptly one foot went forward and his head snapped back. "Easy, son," the old man said. "Want to wreck the joint, lose your job and get jugged for a month?"

After a foggy process that might have been thinking, the lad said he guessed he didn't. His belligerence faded into stupid bewilderment and he let the synthetic cowgirls lead him back to his seat, where after one drink and some reflection which may have touched upon the fact that, somehow, he had been frustrated in something, he began an insane, loud argument with a bartender.

The old man came up to Ralston and Sadar. "Jack," he said to Ralston, "somebody that don't know you may lower the boom on you sometime." He looked with frank interest at Sadar. "Who's your friend, Jack?"

"Him? He— Hell! I don't know." Ralston scowled at Sadar. "You started to ask about Deedee Ducray a minute ago. Well, here he is."

Sadar introduced himself. Ralston's handshake had all the vigor of a dead trout. There was hardness and power in the big, square-tipped hand Ducray thrust forward. He was bigger than Sadar had first thought, wide-shouldered, with plenty of meat apparent under the shiny new jumper. Somewhere in his early sixties, Sadar thought, his age showing most in the slight sag of flesh away from high cheek bones and jaw angle. Thick, coarse gray hair lay like a cap on Ducray's skull; his eyes were live brown, hooded at the outside corners; his nose was big and jutted like a sail.

Sadar grinned. "I saw your timbering at the hotel. Mighty nice framing, I'd say."

"Thanks. Not many kids your age would know that." Ducray gave Sadar's beard the once-over. "You live around this part of the mountains?"

"I came to Alpine from Washington last year." The truth was a lie but let it be. "You an old-timer here?"

Ducray nodded. "Born in Sylvanite. Know its history like a book."

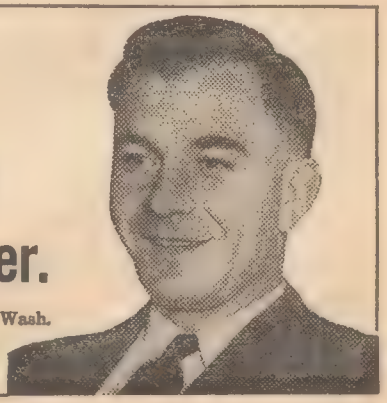
There's the opening you've been waiting for, Sadar told himself. The guy tailored it to order, and now he's standing there with a "your move" look in his eye.

"I'm interested in spar property," Sadar said. "Flourspar mainly. Any here?"

Ralston snorted. "Damn little!"

JOE NYE*

has switched to Calvert because Calvert is mellower.



*of N. 5309 Whitehouse, Spokane, Wash.

CALVERT RESERVE Blended Whiskey—86.8 Proof—65% Grain Neutral Spirits. Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City

"There's some spotty deposits down the valley," Ducray said. "Never been any development work that I know of."

The bartender delivered Sadar's drink. Ralston and Ducray declined his invitation to have one. He took a slow drink, mentally agreeing with Ralston's crack about three cents' worth of whiskey. Then he looked at the pair and invited both to have dinner with him.

Ralston shook his head. "I got work."

Ducray looked at the booths along the wall. "I know where we can get some real grub."

Sadar tossed a dollar on the bar. "Lead on."

RALSTON went outside with them. He grunted what might have been "Good night" or "Go to hell" and walked down the street, a lean, thin-chested figure with a chip-on-the-shoulder stride. Sadar watched him go and smiled. "Don't tread on me . . ."

"He's all right," Ducray said. "His disposition is not his fault, and he just don't like Reeves a little louder than some of the rest of us."

"The bartender claimed it was over a mine deal."

Ducray laughed. "That may be. Ralston owns the Hibernian—inherited it. There's talk that he tried to get Rouviere to finance a reopening." He started up the street. "It's quite a little walk where we're going." After several paces he said, "The Hibernian and the Vivandiere lie side by side."

Vivandiere, eh? Sadar thought. I'm supposed to recognize the name.

Ducray led him toward a section of town where no lights and no inhabited structures showed among the ruins. Sadar raised his eyes to dark Sylvan Mountain. Perhaps somewhere deep under that dark coat of aspens lay twenty-seven sacks of calaverite; somewhere in gloom and water that had been accumulating for thirty years; somewhere a pile of highgrade layered by rotted canvas . . . five hundred miles of workings . . .

"The old holes caved pretty bad?" he asked.

Ducray gave him a quick glance. "Some parts had awful bad runs that was spiled. In those places the whole country would be down now. Then there's drifts where the granite is probably solid as a church today. On top the hill I got a little penny-ante hole, but that's the only place where Mister Dupont had been burnt in many's the long year."

"Any of the mines go for taxes—like the rest of the property everybody's been scrambling to buy up?"

"Not none of the big ones, like the Hibernian and the Vivandiere. Rouviere owns the Viv—inherited it from his uncle, old Marcus Besse. All the big producers are still owned by somebody paying taxes. People just naturally hang on to old holes." They walked on in silence.

Nothing was inadequate about the lighting system of Sylvanite, Sadar noticed. Even on deserted streets each corner had a lamp. Brick structures showed now and then among the ruins of less substantial buildings; the walks were made of honest concrete; the streets were wide and well drained.

As they stepped from a high curb at an intersection Ducray grunted and grabbed Sadar's shoulder. The old man nearly fell before Sadar got an arm around him.

"Down! Let me sit down a minute!" Ducray muttered.

Sadar helped him to a sitting position on the curb. Ducray leaned sidewise and stretched one leg. His face was gray.

"Heart?" Sadar asked.

Ducray shook his head. "Trick hip from a cave-in when I was younger than you." He leaned sidewise on one arm and worked his right leg. "Sometimes just a little step the wrong way makes my back and hip feel like the way they was the night I come to in the hospital."

Several minutes later Sadar helped him rise. Ducray's face was still pale, covered with fine sweat. "I'll be all right now. You didn't think I was going to die, with supper just around the corner?" His laugh was game, and he limped on.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRE HORSE BOYS

THE LIGHT they neared came through clean windows in a narrow, two-story building. It shone defiantly midst somnolent ruins in a deserted street, as if

daring the dead past to shoulder too hard against this lone building.

Inside, a massive mahogany bar and an ornate, carved backbar ran almost the entire length of a narrow room, ending just short of wide doors that opened the side wall. At the end of the room was one narrow door. The place was brightly lighted by bare bulbs on drop cords running down from a metal ceiling. The entire wall opposite the bar was covered with framed pictures.

The man behind the bar near the wide doors didn't move when Sadar and Ducray entered. His face was toward them, with light from the bulb above him making the dead-center part of his black hair look like a long scar.

Sadar and Ducray went forward, passing a long table with eight heavy chairs. It seemed to Sadar that he was walking straight into the past toward an uncertain goal.

The man behind the bar stared and did not speak. He was of Ducray's age, Sadar estimated, shorter and powerfully stacked. No trace of gray showed in thick black hair that was parted in the middle and curled back from the temples in the mode of bartenders that Sadar had never seen, save in pictures. For a moment Sadar thought he'd seen surprise on the man's face, but when he came closer and looked into hard slate eyes, he could read nothing but impassiveness on the wide, brown face.

From somewhere beyond the wide doorway at the end of the bar Sadar heard the clink of poker chips.

"What's your name, lad?" the man behind the bar asked suddenly. His voice carried a sepulchral boom, his words coming forth like the measured thump of thick liquid from a stone jug.

Ducray spoke up and introduced the two. "This is Ben Liggett," he told Sadar. "He's sort of the shift boss at the Fire Horse Club here. A few of us old-timers that don't think much of the new deal in Sylvanite try to stick together the best way we can."

Liggett's brown-mottled hand was warm and heavy. His grip, Sadar decided, didn't come from tending bar.

"Brought the boy over to eat," Ducray explained.

"Where you from, son?" Liggett asked.

"Alpine."

Liggett nodded slowly. He studied Sadar closely for several moments, then moved one hand behind the bar. A switch clicked.

"Lived in Alpine long?" Ducray asked.

Sadar was looking across the room at a large picture of a boxer. "I've been there since I came from Washington." He pointed with his head. "Who's the fighter?"

"Jack Dempsey," Ducray said. "The original Jack Dempsey, the Nonpareil."

Sadar walked across the room. Old Jack Dempsey was in good company there on the wall: Sullivan, looking ready to curse; Corbett, his hair neatly combed; baldheaded old Fritz; Choynski, Tom Sharkey, the Durable Dane . . .

Liggett was moving utensils behind the bar, humming the *Monterey Waltz* in a voice that was occasionally sonorous, mostly rumble. Ducray limped to the table and sat down.

Sadar moved down the wall. Here was a panorama of Sylvanite in the early days, doubtless a print of the same picture from which the mural in the Big Stope had been copied. He looked at hose cart teams, muscular lads with lots of hair, bare chests and baggy tights. Before he glanced at the name he knew the big, smiling, bearded man standing by a hose cart.

Samuel T. Rigdon, Team Captain
World's Championship Hose Cart Team from Vivandiere Mine. Leadville Competition, July 4th, 1897.

"Those pictures are almost relics now," Ducray said. "You don't know how bad Reeves wanted to buy everything in this saloon. We barely beat him to it."

Sadar turned from the wall. "I can see how everything would fit into the old-time atmosphere Rouviere is trying to revive." He glanced toward the wide doors, listening to the sounds of cards and chips.

"Take a look at the casino," Liggett said.

Ducray rose. "I'll show you. My hip gets better faster if I walk on it, anyway."

FIVE old men were playing poker under a bright light at a round table in a room so large more than half of it was lost in shadows. From what Sadar could see it appeared that all original

equipment was stacked somewhere in the room.

One man in an undented black hat that shadowed his eyes was watching the game. His head jerked nervously toward Sadar when he entered the casino.

"Boys, this is Mr. Sadar."

The poker players looked up indifferently. Two or three muttered "Howdy," then turned back to the game. In that instant's break Sadar saw the man who was getting ready to deal cut the cards twice with one hand while both hand and deck were clear of the table. It was an old trick Sadar had practiced himself for amusement during long days in Alaska, but he'd never been able to accomplish it twice in a row without spilling cards.

He appraised the dealer. The fellow wore a rumpled white shirt, flowered tie askew at the collar and a shapeless brown suit. His fine, thin gray hair stuck up in a disorderly wisp; his eyes were small, close-set and full of humor, his face broad and red. Put him in overalls behind a plow . . .

"Play 'em like you had 'em!" the dealer said jovially. Blunt, clumsy-looking fingers completed the deal. He looked at Sadar and grinned.

There is an artist, Sadar thought. I'll bet he dealt seconds all the way and I couldn't even hear it. He thought of smooth, likable Angelo Griego, two years a soldier in Alaska by request, professional gambler by choice. Angelo had spent many an evening in the quonset, showing Sadar every crooked card trick he knew—and Angie knew plenty.

But this dealer—Swede, he must be, by accent and appearance—could make Angelo look stiff-fingered and clumsy on that cut trick alone. A man who could cut that little dido with the smooth, noiseless speed the dealer had shown could probably do anything with cards.

He looked around the table. All five men had plenty of chips.

Two men stayed with the Swede when he opened. They drew cards, bet freely and stood the Swede's raises, hiking the bets until pale yellow chips lay spilled like wafers of gold in the center of the table. The cards went up and the dealer pawed the pot toward him with blunt, awkward-looking hands.

"Well! I sure am lucky!"

You sure are, Sadar thought.

He felt Ducray's hand tap his side and turned. The small man in the black hat was standing several feet away, peering intently into Sadar's face. The man's eyes flashed restlessly, played over Sadar's countenance like points of steel.

"Meet Sim Tarwater," Ducray said. "Sim used to be a night shifter on the Vivandiere."

The little man shot Ducray a startled look. He edged closer to shake hands, his manner implying that he was going to get

Two or three players muttered "Howdy," then turned back to the game.

the job done and then leap back to safety.

Tarwater's grip was talon like, all the pressure coming from his thumb and forefinger. Sadar glanced at the hand as Tarwater withdrew it. The knuckles showed craters like black scars on an aspen trunk; running from under the tight clasp of a black jersey sleeve the white-ridged scar of a brutal injury angled across the back of the small hand. Small wonder three of the man's fingers were half curled and stiff.

"Sadar, huh?" Tarwater's voice was low and calm, bore a strange soothing quality that was in hard contrast to the leaping, disturbed expression of his eyes. They weren't black, Sadar decided. Dark blue made darker by the color of his hat and the black Navy jersey. His thin coppery face was hatchet-like, his mouth full-lipped and composed.

Only the darting play of his eyes indicated inner tension.

"That's right," Sadar said.

"I don't remember that name, but . . ." Tarwater's eyes flicked over Sadar's beard, went questioningly to Ducray. "You look all right to me."

He went quickly back to his position.

The Swede lost three pots in a row to three different players, and laughed loudly at each loss.

Little Sim Tarwater kept darting worried glances at Sadar.

From the wide doorway Liggett's voice boomed. "Grub is ready!"

I wonder how that voice would sound in a big, empty building at night, Sadar thought.

As he passed the end of the bar he saw a squat refrigerator, an electric stove and a gleaming sink behind the wide mahogany. The Fire Horse boys were doing all right. He wondered where their money was coming from. On the bar, sizzling in a huge blue platter with Dutch windmills, was the biggest steak Sadar had seen in a long time. Liggett was setting out more dishes.

Sadar and Ducray carried the food to the long table.

A HALF hour later Sadar said: "That was as big as a moose steak and not half as lean. I'd say you boys hadn't suffered, bucking Rouviere."

Ducray prodded at his teeth with the nail of his little finger. "We're against Reeves, but mainly we're against being bought body and soul. That's what'll happen here if he has his way. A lot of the old-timers here ain't eaten so good at times, but they've always been independent. Some of us want to stay that way. Sure, we'll take Reeves' money when we can get it. I got a right fair wad for framing those timbers you saw, but so far all he's bought from most of us is our labor."

Ducray was following the general line, Sadar thought. Reeves' policies in the application of Rouviere's wealth were the major points of resentment, not the millionaire himself or his plans, except as Reeves made them distasteful.

Ducray's brown eyes were earnest. "Let me tell you a little. Reeves is a local boy. He got around quite a bit in the newspaper business, correspondent during the war and all of that. Somewhere he got acquainted with Rouviere and together they hatched up this plan of bringing the town back."

Sadar nodded. "I see." He wondered if Ducray would later pursue that stall about flourspar. It hadn't been a very good lie in the first place, and the old man must have recognized it as such. No, Ducray's motive in bringing him to the Fire Horse had been something else. He listened with half attention to Ducray's version of the local feud, wondering how he could get the subject back to more important matters.

". . . something to help the town along. So Reeves got a Hungarian or Romanian, or something, to make a survery about finding handicraft work for the natives here to help themselves. This lousy foreigner compared Sylvanite to some little village in Europe where the peasants were saved from starvation by making sheepherder's cloaks or capes of some kind for export to this country." Ducray shook his head bitterly. "When that story come out in a Denver paper it made us look like a bunch of hungry, ragged peons. That's just one of the cockeyed things Reeves done around here. How would you feel?"

"Pretty damned sore." Sadar wasn't inattentive now. Reeves must be an arrogant stinker for sure.

Ducray had draped his denim jumper

over the back of his chair. Sadar saw that the old man's shirt was worn and patched. All the bottles on the backbar, he'd noted before, were empty as a second lieutenant's head. Still, there was expensive equipment behind the bar, that stove and all. . . . The poker players had been betting heavy, even if it was just a penny ante game.

"Rouviere has brought money into the town, hasn't he?" Sadar asked.

"No argument there. It's just the way Reeves has gone about things that galls us."

"How about Rouviere?"

"He ain't been here much till this summer. He's left things pretty much up to Reeves."

Sadar looked at the display of empty bottles across the room. Ben Liggett was standing at the bar, his thick forearms crossed on the wood, his face a big brown blot as he stood quietly and listened.

"How do you keep this place going?" Sadar asked. "You don't serve meals or drinks here regularly, do you?"

"We were going to run the bar, but Reeves blocked us from getting a city license," Ducray explained. The corners of his eyes seemed more hooded than ever. "Oh, we do one thing and another." He glanced toward the casino and grinned to himself. "Take that little fraction I got on top the hill. It never was patented and was sort of overlooked for years. Ben and me accidentally staked it just before Reeves decided to run the ski course another three thousand feet along the top of the mountain." He grinned like a pirate. "Of course it cost him a little to cross our ground. Then we had a little dumb luck and ran into a narrow streak of high-grade. It helps out some."

Deedee was silent for a long time. Sadar decided to plunge into his calaverite hunt.

"Tarwater was a shifter on the Vivandiere in the old days, you said?"

Ducray nodded slowly, his eyes hard on Sadar's face. "He was there when the vug was robbed."

"That was the million-dollar job, eh?"

"Not by a long swipe! But it was plenty; twenty-seven sacks of damn rich calaverite went out of a vug with a bank vault door on it; went out of a back door that's wasn't supposed to be there. It didn't go far. It's still in the hill."

"How do you know?"

"It didn't get out of the hill the night it was took because the regular dryroom checks made it tough for a man to get out with a piece of highgrade big as a pea, let alone twenty-seven sacks of anything. From the day after it was stole, there was a man or two from the mine owners' association at every hole that was even close to the Vivandiere Number Four. From then on there's a lot of good reasons why that calaverite never came to sunlight." Deedee leaned forward. "She's there yet, and it would cost a man more than the stuff is worth to get at it—even if a man knew where it was. There she is and there she'll stay, long after both of us are gone."

SADAR wondered if the other's positiveness was a calculated effort to discourage. If it was, that meant Deedee knew why Sadar was in Sylvanite, knew who he was. The longer he considered the possibility, the surer Sadar became that he was right. For one thing, Ducray's story of the robbery had been rather incomplete, as if the teller assumed the listener knew a great many details already.

He didn't get a chance to select one of the questions jarring against others in his mind.

Car lights swept against the windows, then steadied in a blaze against the front of the building, throwing reflection into a maroon convertible with the top down. Two couples got out of the automobile. A cub bear tried to follow and almost threw itself as its chain came up short against its mooring on the steering post.

"There's Jackie Rouviere," Deedee said. "And she's in damn poor company again." He called across the room to Ben. "Get Reeves' bid up as high as you can—and then we'll harpoon him some more to see him wiggle." To Sadar he explained, "Reeves would like to buy our casino loot for his damn poker festival during Boom Days. We've been stringing him along."

"We're stringing him only till he gets right on the bid," Liggett growled. "This place don't run on air, Deedee." He cleared his throat with a sound like the drive of a shovel into a coal pile. "He won't get right."

The first girl inside, accompanied by a

long-jawed, balding young man wearing glasses, was the Myra who had connived in pulling hairs from Sadar's head. She saw him instantly and began to grin. She simulated a fiendish look and made plucking motions with her fingers against her cheek. Sadar grinned in return.

He was not surprised to see that Jackie Rouviere was the same Jackie who had been hanging lamps when he came out of the hotel. The big, swagger-chested, red-bearded man with her was the same fellow who had given Sadar the insolent look from the Big Stope doorway. He tried to classify Jackie Rouviere according to how much she might know of her father's knowledge of the Vivandiere mine, but his mind went astray.

The four started up the narrow room. Then Myra and her escort diverged to look at pictures. Reeves and Jackie came on, he holding her arm as if dragging her through a crowded railway station. He didn't give Sadar a retake. The first glance was thorough and seemed to indicate that he considered Ducray and Sadar fitting company for each other, but his voice was smooth when he said, "Good evening, Deedee."

Ducray nodded.

Abreast of the long table, Jackie halted and tapped her arm. "May I have this back now?"

"Oh!" Reeves smiled agreeably. "I didn't realize. Excuse me a minute while I talk to Ben."

He went up to Liggett, who didn't bother to grunt in reply to a pleasant salutation. Jackie came directly to the table. "Don't get up," she said. Both men were already on their feet, Deedee's face proof that, if he didn't like Rouviere, the animosity didn't include Rouviere's daughter. He stumbled a little in introducing Sadar to her.

"We met, more or less, at the hotel this evening," Jackie said.

Some of his age seemed to leave Ducray as he beamed at the girl. I'll bet that old duck got around in his day, Sadar thought.

"In my day we couldn't meet young women so easy-like," Deedee said. "That whistling stuff would've got us what-for!"

"He didn't whistle, Deedee."

"What did he do, then?"

"I used the flourspar gag," Sadar said, watching Ducray intently.

The old man's quick smile showed Sadar what he'd suspected: that Ducray hadn't been taken in for a second by the lie. Probably Ralston hadn't either.

"Deal me in," Jackie said. "Or is this some of that rugged man-talk?"

"I just lied a little about being a spar promoter in order to crash a good place to eat," Sadar said.

Jackie smiled. "I wondered what you were doing in this nest of opposition to light and progress. At first I thought you were somebody Biff had imported for color; that is, until I saw him check your name with Al Harris."

Sadar knew he did a poor job of concealing surprise.

"He was disturbed that a guest of the Big Stope should arrive on such an—an unusual cargo." Jackie's tone implied that she was needling both Reeves and Sadar.

Sadar looked at Deedee. "I came in with a farmer hauling fertilizer and spuds." He felt the need for further explanation and

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was irritated by the thought. "I didn't want to wait for a bus in that place down the river." He regretted the unnecessary clarification instantly.

Deedee laughed and said, "Well, it got you here, didn't it?" and Jackie said, "That bus *is* no bargain." He saw the unspoken question that both held silent.

Yeah, Sadar thought; and now both of you are asking yourselves why I was in such a hurry.

HE LOOKED at Ducray. The old man was studying him carefully. Jackie sensed something in the exchange of looks. "I don't want to interrupt a big mining deal or something," she said. "So I'll just pop over and look at the art gallery. This is the first time I've ever been in this rebel stronghold, you know, Deedee. Before I start the tour, I want to know who that man threatening his wife is." She looked toward the backbar where a mirror had been removed to hang a large picture of a slender man jabbing a belligerent finger and holding a chair in one hand.

Ducray chuckled. "That's Billy Sunday. He's just before busting the devil and demon rum with that chair."

"When that picture was hung, I imagine he couldn't have found a better place than this to campaign," she said.

She walked toward the couple who had worked down to the hose cart pictures by now.

Deedee tipped his head and watched her go. "She don't look or act a bit like her old man."

"Just a little around the eyes, only his sort of pop out," Sadar said.

Ducray regarded him quietly. "You know Rouviere?"

Sadar shook his head. "I saw him, that's all."

They sat down again, and unspoken matters they had been probing toward carefully came back strongly in their minds.

From the casino sounds of the poker game drifted in, between laughs of those looking at pictures. Little Sim Tarwater peered around the casing for an instant, then withdrew like a shy animal. Tarwater, Sadar decided, would be the very man to talk to about the Vivandiere robbery.

Ben Liggett leaned in monolithic calm on the bar while Reeves gave several reasons why the gambling equipment stacked in the Fire Horse casino should not be allowed to lie unused. Ben was unimpressed.

"It's the most complete layout of old-time gambling equipment I ever saw," Reeves said.

"I know that," Ben rumbled.

"How does this sound?" Reeves made an offer.

"Not near good enough."

"The stuff is doing no good where it is," Reeves said.

"That's right."

Reeves voice didn't rise but exasperation began to soak into his tone. "Why be a dog in a manger?"

"Why be a cheap-skate?"

Sadar saw the back of Reeves' neck redden.

"See here, Liggett, I'm only trying to help you fellows along, even if you are the worst die-hard bloc I've had to contend with in Sylvanite."

"I know." Ben's utter detachment was enough to irritate a saint.

Deedee was grinning hugely.

Sadar's eyes strayed toward Jackie. He decided he liked the way she moved, the way she held her head when she smiled. A millionaire's daughter, eh? . . . Don't get any ideas, Sadar. You've got a big enough job on your hands as it is. Still, a man could look, couldn't he? No law against that.

"See here, Deedee, what do you think about that equipment in the casino? You and Ben own it jointly, don't you?" Reeves had crossed the room and was standing by the table. His voice was level but there was tightness in his eyes that betrayed irritation.

"Why, I think it's pretty good stuff," Ducray evaded.

Sadar grinned and was rewarded with a mind-your-business stare from Reeves.

To hell with him, Sadar thought. He knew he had taken an anti-Reeves position from the time old Charley began to tell about the feud; on top of that, his dislike for Reeves was dated from his first glimpse of the man. Though he realized that even mental involvement in the local difficulty was a bootless detour away from his goal, Sadar couldn't help himself.

He widened his grin and watched Reeves' face.

"You know what I mean," Reeves told Ducray. "I've given you fellows a lot of work, Ducray; I've bought your damn vegetables and—"

The old man began to bristle. His lips tightened and his eyes blazed. "Sure you have! Now you want us to *give* you that gambling equipment to rob each and every tourist sucker with all during Boom Day!"

"That's not exactly accurate, Ducray." Reeves' eyes were tight with anger but his voice was still controlled.

"Call me a liar—!" Deedee leaped up. He grabbed Reeves' arm.

Startled, Sadar thought how unlike the man's previous behavior the action was. He looked at the big hand on Reeves' forearm, remembered how easily it had stopped the beefy drunk who was going for Ralston. He heard Jackie call, "Biff! Deedee! Don't be fools!"

"I didn't call you a liar—exactly." Reeves started to detach the hand from his arm. "Now take it easy, Pop."

"Don't you Pop me, you young punk!" Ducray raised his other hand.

Reeves stepped back, at the same time jerking his arm free and pushing the old man away. It was not a vicious shove, but Deedee staggered backward. His face went gray and he dropped into his chair with a groan. "Damned hip!" he muttered savagely.

Sadar didn't push his chair back. He rose swiftly, slicing his legs between the chair and the table. He faced Reeves. "You don't do bad with old people, Reeves."

"It's none of your business, Sadar." Reeves' eyes were hard and watchful. "You stick to your fertilizer hauling. Be sure you got the money for your hotel bill at the end of the week."

Even as he jabbed his left hand out, Sadar realized Reeves had been waiting for that very feint. The red-bearded man moved his head easily. He beat Sadar's right by a fraction and the latter stumbled backward across the narrow room. His cheekbone felt numb and the back of his head was aching. If he hadn't barely managed to get his nose to one side of that one. . .

His head hit the bar. One foot was still moving. It became entangled between the bar and brass rail.

"For heaven's sakes, Biff!" Jackie sounded disgusted.

Big and solid in the middle of the narrow room, Reeves looked at the girl and smiled. "He asked for it."

Sadar's efforts to free his foot seemed frenzied. He threshed around like a horse hobbled for the first time. He half stumbled when he left the bar, charging straight toward Reeves. The red-bearded man's smile turned to sneer. He shifted his feet a little and waited. Sadar's right hand was low and cocked as if ready for a mighty, upcurving roundhouse.

He started the swing.

Reeves' timing was almost perfect. Sadar's momentum should have provided half the force to leave him flat on the back of his neck after the other's fist came through.

The blow came through all right but Sadar's head wasn't there.

He'd checked his wild rush and was leaning back when Reeves' straight right flashed at his chin. Sadar went under the arm and struck twice just below Reeves' breast bone. The brown-bearded man's knees and hips twisted with the blows. His big wrists were straight.

Reeves' cough was a gush. He doubled over and his knees started to unhinge. Sadar straightened him with a short uppercut. Then he drove his shoulder into the man's stomach and grasped him behind the knees. Reeves was almost limp when Sadar came erect with him in a flour sack carry and started for the door. The long-jawed man with glasses opened the door.

Sadar dumped his burden on the sidewalk in a sitting position. Reeves' legs weren't in good working order yet and he was having a little trouble getting air. He gasped and gave Sadar a look of bitter, burning hatred. "This—isn't over. Let me—catch—my—breath."

"It's enough for one session," Jackie said. She stood before Sadar for a moment, studied his beard, ran her eyes over his face as if wanting to be sure of something.

"He asked for it," Sadar said, watching Jackie carefully.

Jackie nodded calmly, her eyes wide and dark. "So he did."

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD WARNING

SADAR heard the maroon convertible pulling away before he reached the table on his return to the room. Deedee was sitting on the floor, leaning sidewise and working his leg. Some of the poker players were standing around him. Ben Liggett hadn't moved from the bar. His arms were still folded before him and his brown face was inscrutable.

Sadar felt his cheekbone, decided it was cut enough so he might not have a mouse. He felt let down, disgusted with himself. I'm getting way off the beam with this sort of thing, he told himself.

He looked at Ducray. The poker players were not touching him. Apparently they had seen his trick hip in action before. Light gleamed on Liggett's black hair, blazed in the center part as he leaned on the bar and didn't move.

Damn such exercise right after chow, Sadar thought. It makes a man's food lay on his stomach like an old rubber boot. He eyed Ducray narrowly.

"Did you promote that thing purposely?" Sadar asked suddenly.

Ducray twisted his head and grinned with white lips. His face was the color of his smooth cap of gray hair. That, and his pain-darkened eyes gave him a death's head look. "You didn't think I was fool enough to tackle a big youngster like him on my own?"

Ben's mausoleum voice boomed out. "Help him into the other bed in my room."

Sadar straightened him with a short uppercut.

Deedee shook off hands and got to his feet by himself. He didn't protest when, after a few dragging steps, two men helped him through the narrow door in the back of the room.

Sadar looked around for Sim Tarwater. Apparently Sim hadn't come from the casino to see the fight. Neither was the Swede present. Sadar went along the bar and looked inside the casino. The Swede was sitting alone at the card table, idly looking at his hands. He looked up and grinned. "Short fight, lad. It was over before I could get started."

Little Sim was gone.

The poker players walked past Sadar standing in the doorway. One of the pair who had helped Deedee into the bedroom grumbled to his companion as they went by, "Ain't that Deedee the damndest one to growl at you when you try to help him?"

Sadar turned just as Liggett took his arms from the bar and started to stow a Frontier Model Colt that had been lying behind his heavy wrists. "Just in case that salmon-jawed fellow got gay," Ben explained. "I knowed he wouldn't, but I was fixed to scare him a little." He put the gun away and resumed his old position.

Scare him a little, eh? Sadar looked at Liggett's deep-set slaty eyes. He studied the thick hands resting on the bar. They showed the hardness and color of skin that had been exposed to manual labor.

"Why did Deedee start that beef?" Sadar asked.

Ben shrugged. "Partly because he don't like Reeves; maybe because he didn't want him to find out something we're doing here."

What in the name of soup, mud and potatoes could these old gees be doing that they had to conceal from Reeves? Sadar considered for a moment the sudden hunch that the feud might, somehow, be tied in with his own business in Sylvanite.

"You mine here in the old days?" he asked.

Ben shook his head slowly. "Very little underground work. Mostly I railroaded and blacksmithed." His eyes flicked across the room, came back to Sadar. "You know what, son?"

Sadar watched him quietly.

"If I was you, I wouldn't fool around Sylvanite much, unless it was just to go fishing," Liggett said.

"Why?"

Ben wagged his head ponderously. There was calmness in the gesture, in his eyes, and finality in his refusal to say any more on the subject. Nor did he, though Sadar tried for more information until he began to feel foolish. He fully realized then how Ben's impassiveness had got under Reeves' hide.

He gave up. "Where did Tarwater go?"

"Probably straight out the back door when the fight started. Sim won't even stay around a loud argument."

"Sensitive?" Sadar hadn't meant to sound sarcastic.

Ben's voice was harsh and his eyes glittered when he said, "He's got reasons. You ought to know part of them."

"I don't."

Liggett grunted, staring like a basilisk.

Every blessed one of them think I know all about that calaverite.

"Where does Tarwater live?"

"On the Tumbling, around the north shoulder of the hill, about a mile and a half from here. I wouldn't go near there at night."

"Uh-huh?"

"Sim's hell for pets. One of them is a lion that hangs pretty close around the cabin."

"That how Tarwarter got the crippled hand?"

Ben nodded. "Another pet lion—before you was born."

In spite of Ducray's leading him to the Fire Horse Club for some unknown reason, in spite of Liggett's warning and his refusal to explain it, Sadar realized that neither man had seemed unfriendly. For a stranger, they had accepted him readily.

He laid a five-dollar note on the bar. "For the best steak I ever hope to eat."

ONCE in the cool night outside he glanced back through the window. Ben was still motionless at the bar, staring at the wall.

He went down the silent street, past building after building where the only inhabitant was decay. Sylvan Mountain was blue-black on his left. Glow from red

and green neon in the remodeled, inhabited part of town made a garish aurora borealis on his right.

Between him and that glow was the silent past.

He walked until an unused street brought him to the lower end of town. Here Tumbling River was loud and constant, oblivious of its own roar. The noises of its waters rumbled up from the deep canyon, rolled in waves against the dark shoulder of the mountain. I am here, the river seemd to say. For centuries I have poured and thundered from this rocky passage that I cut, long before the first prospector set pick in Sylvan Mountain. What if ore trains, dynamite, the belch and stench of smelters and human hubbub overshadowed me for a fleeting instant. My sounds are eternal. I am here.

Cars making the curve that led to a long highway bridge flashed light on the tall, bare-headed figure standing high on a ledge about the rumbling stream. A jeepful of laughing youngsters shouted at him. The car hit the steel running plates of the bridge with a clatter. Girls squealed as the driver swung the vehicle from side to side.

There was something soothing, almost hypnotic in the ceaseless even sounds that came up from the canyon. The petty jarrings of the day were leveled into unimportance by the rumbling of water blended into night. Sadar stood motionless, trying to put together fragments from the day. Suddenly he yawned and realized that he was tired and sleepy.

He started back to the hotel.

He passed three street lights. Between him and the next one he saw a small figure coming silently along the walk. They met face to face and the oncoming man stopped without a sound.

It was Sim Tarwater. The light was at his back and his eyes were in shadows, but Sadar felt the restlessness of those dark blue orbs as Tarwater faced him.

"You *are* Sam Rigdon's grandson?" Tarwater asked in his oddly soothing voice.

"I am."

"I knew it! So did Ben and Deedee. You might be Sam himself forty, fifty years ago."

Sadar wished the man would turn or shift his head. All he could see was a shadowy, thin face under the black dome of an undented hat.

"Is he still alive?" Tarwater asked.

Sadar nodded. "You knew him well?"

"I set great store by Sam." Tarwater's voice was as soothing as the river.

"Then you can tell me—"

"Sam didn't know any more about it than I did. That's the truth, but there are people here yet who don't believe that. Remember, Young Sam."

The little man slipped past Sadar and went on down the street. His feet made no sound. He left the walk and angled toward the shadows of a vacant lot and the night took him.

The everlasting sound of water came back strong and endless from the canyon.

You'll tell me more than that, Sim Tarwater, Sadar thought. But I see you'll have to be handled gently. He looked toward the darkness where Sim had disappeared. Yes, Tarwater would be the man to talk to, and tomorrow wouldn't be too soon.

Sadar cut over one street, working

Aaron Robinson*

has switched to Calvert because Calvert is smoother.

*of 8701 Shore Road, Brooklyn, N. Y.

CALVERT RESERVE Blended Whiskey—86.8 Proof—65% Grain Neutral Spirits. Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City

toward the oiled stretch that was the highway route through town.

He felt that the evening had been well spent. He hadn't learned a thing, but Ben had warned him off, and in a less direct manner, so had Tarwater. Deedee had sparred with him for information. Possibly all three men had a lead on the calaverite. Certainly Tarwater should have some good theories, having been a shifter at the Vivandiere at the time of the robbery. So they knew who he was. Well, that couldn't be helped. All three men had been friendly, even though they had jumped at the right conclusion associated with his presence in Sylvanite.

Maybe they figured he had some first-hand information from his grandfather. Perhaps they wouldn't be so friendly when they discovered he didn't even know the details of the robbery and was trying to pry information from them. He thought of bitter, green-eyed Ralston, wondering again if Ralston had tried to get Rouviere's support in opening the Hibernian because Ralston thought the highgrade was concealed there.

Well, let them all be looking for the twenty-seven sacks. His presence would serve to spur them to greater efforts. Let anybody who could find it, only the discovery had to be made public. That might prove the tricky part, unless he found the calaverite himself.

HE STOPPED by a metal lamp post and looked at the black bulk of Sylvan Mountain. Somewhere in utter darkness in the honey-combed granite guts of the hill the highgrade still must be. No doubt the mountain had been ransacked after the robbery, and probably prowled by hundreds in search of the stolen wealth in the years after the mines closed. He wondered why Deedee was so sure the calaverite hadn't been found in the years after the robbery; why he could even be positive that it hadn't been brought to the surface the very night of the theft. Perversely he began to argue against the one fact he had to assume if his quest was to mean anything more than a futile gesture: that the highgrade was still in the mountain. Perhaps it had come out under loads of muck and had gone over the dump to be picked up by confederates.

He turned to go.

The sound from a dark lane between two sagging buildings was not loud. He heard it at almost the same instant something clanged against the fluted pillar of the lamp support. He caught a glimpse of a bright object in flight, then heard it strike a board fence somewhere across the street.

For a breath he thought some mischievous boy had thrown a tin can. From the darkness between the two buildings he heard running sounds. He leaped from the sidewalk and ran toward the noise. The smooth wire of an old fence caught him hip-high and threw him sidewise. He twisted for balance and grabbed the fence with one hand. The act broke his fall, but he sat down in damp weeds and a tangle of wire while staples screeched from unseen posts.

The running footsteps merged into silence. From the canyon Tumbling River rumbled its muted, distant sound.

He went back to the light, brushing at his pants. Under the lamp he paused to pluck the most troublesome of a hundred weed burrs from around his ankles. Then he went across the street and looked among the weeds by the fence where the missile had struck. For a while he found nothing but burrs to replace the one he'd removed. Then he saw a faint metallic gleam where the weeds were highest near the fence. For a moment, after he straightened, feeling the cold trimness of smooth metal, he thought he had the tip of a jointed casting rod. His fingers reached one end of the slender shaft and he knew what he held.

It was an arrow, approximately two feet long, made of tubular aluminum. The steel head was ridged and tapered to a deadly sharp point.

Under the street light he examined the missile closely. Inert in his hands, the shaft was as deadly looking as a trim, new automatic pistol.

Sadar glanced off into darkness, then knelt by the lamp post. Light caught on a bright nick made through flaking paint, rust and metal on the ridge of a flute.

The arrow had been aimed stomach-high.

He tried to remember exactly where he had been standing before he turned. As nearly as he could recall his position had

The sound from a dark lane between two sagging buildings was not loud. He heard it at almost the same instant something clanged against the lamp post.

been right at the post. He had swung away just as the archer released the deadly arrow.

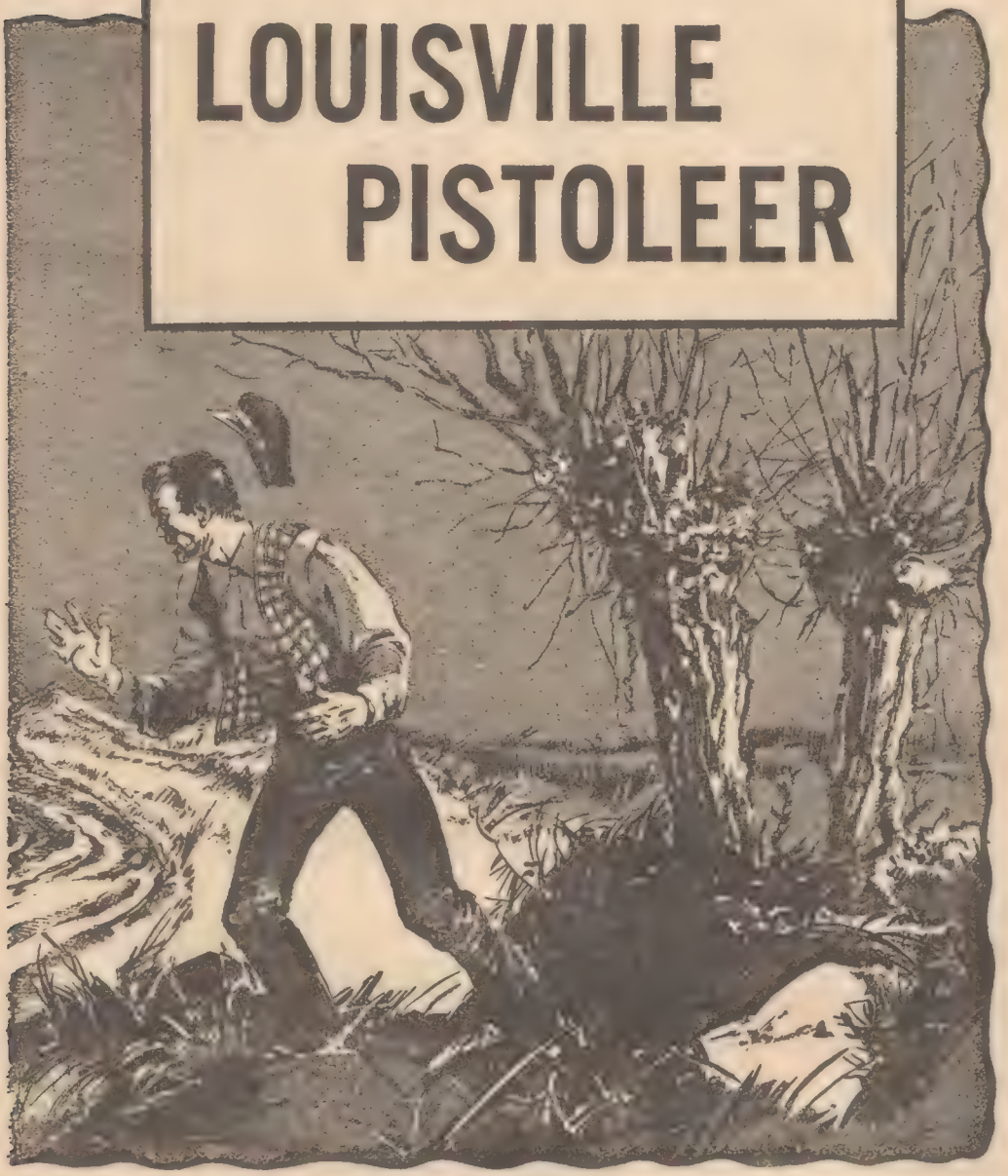
Whoever it was had not been trying to scare him or warn him off. The person who had stood in the shadows between those two buildings had aimed to drive that wedge of dark steel and the bright, slender tube clear through his guts.

(End of Part I)

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER L. THOMAS

BILLIE SELLEW sat on his heels in the empty marketplace and waited patiently for the long night to pass. He didn't much like Cincinnati. Scent of livery stables and steamboat smoke hung heavy in the August air. He was figuring the time at about ten o'clock when the man came across the cobbles through the

LOUISVILLE PISTOLEER



As the major lifted out the pistol, Sellew lunged forward.

By

MERLE CONSTINER

glow of the street lamp. He was a big man, flabby, and carried a suit of gentleman's clothes over his arm; his beaver was dented and his soiled waistcoat was embroidered with birds and flowers. He said loudly, "Well, strike me up a gum tree! A nipper from the backwoods. Howdy, nipper!"

Sellew was twenty-two and married, but he was a quarter Wyandot and Indian blood looks young. He made no answer.

"My housekeeper's went an' locked me out agin, dad-rat it," the man said intimately. "They's a little cellar window I kin git through—many's the time I've did it afore—but I've jist came from the tailor's, and who'll hold my nice new suit?" His voice wavered. "I'm a pore ole brokedown coachman and the night air's a-killin' me—!"

Billie Sellew thought it over. It wasn't in him to refuse a decent request. Finally, he got to his feet. "I try to be neighborly," he said. "I hope it ain't far. I got to be gettin' back."

They went down Market to Broadway, past Levassor's Row, and turned into a paved court. "Here we are," the flabby man said. "Mouse it!"

The cottage sat in the shadow of an ancient locust, its bubbleglass panes dark, its slate roof speckled with moonlight; Sellew liked the looks of it. The flabby man took a short iron tool from beneath his waistcoat and pried open the cellar window. He said gruffly, "In with you!"

Sellew was thunderstruck. "Me? I thought—!"

The flabby man seemed not to hear. Wordlessly, Sellew let himself into the back opening, over and down, until his feet touched earth. Outside, his companion spoke, "Behind you is the stairs." He thrust the suit of clothes through the window and Sellew took them from his grasp. "Hang these in the bedroom wardrobe an' then dub the front gigger, open the door fer me. Got it? Good. Now mizzle."

FOR a long moment Billie Sellew stood motionless in the cave-like darkness of the cellar. A chill at the nape of his neck was telling him that things weren't going right. It was then he heard the second voice. Through the window in the violet summer's night, he could see the trousered legs of the flabby man, indistinct and shadowy. A new voice, low and modulated, called softly, "That you, Eggers?"

Then there were footsteps and a second pair of legs. These were the legs of a gentleman, and the voice was the voice of a gentleman.

The gentleman raised his foot and struck a lucifer to his segar; in the spurt of yellow flame Sellew saw the elegant, worn boots, and the hole as big as a five cent piece in the bootsole. The flabby man said fiercely, "Douse the glim, sir!"

"Is he inside?" the gentleman asked.

"He's inside," the flabby man said. "And all's as smooth as silk, sir. But this ain't no place to gab. If you want to talk, see me at the Drayman's Rest. He's a country lad I picked up a-sleepin' off a pot o' wine in the marketplace an' he'll do as he's told. To make sure he doesn't take it into his head to backtrack on us, we'll jest lock him in—" The cellar window was set flush to the sidewalk in a shallow well of fitted stone. With a muscular twist of his hand, the flabby man wedged his iron tool between the sill and the stone ledging, jamming the window in its frame.

An instant later, the legs outside the window were gone.

That does it, Sellew thought calmly. Caught like a partridge in a youngster's box-trap. Anyway you looked at it, it didn't make sense—but he'd better get out of this place, and quick. Carrying the clothes carefully, for he had an inborn respect for other folks' property, he groped his way across the cellar floor and reached the steps.

The cellar steps brought him up into a kitchen; there were food smells here, and the moonlight gleamed on a burnished stove and a cupboard of chinaware. The kitchen door led into a small study-parlor. Now there was the smell of cheap tobacco, and he had the sensation of shelved books and a threadbare carpet. In the dusty silver nightglow which filtered through the diamond-paned windows he got his bearings in the gloom. By his right hand was a shadowy horsehair sofa, beyond it was the dark doorway to the bedroom. To his left across the room was the street door.

He was bending over the sofa about to lay out the garments, when a man arose from its shadowy depths and seized him by the wrist. Billie Sellew went rigid. "If you're armed," the man declared amiably, "then I've caught a bear by the tail. My pistols are at the pawnshop."

Billie Sellew said nothing.

After a moment, the man released him

and struck flame to a lard oil desk lamp. The room was lined with books indeed, and the carpet was so threadbare that in patches it resembled a carp net—a pleasant room with dark green walls and dark old walnut furniture. On the mantel was a fireman's helmet and a speaking trumpet, and in the corner was a silken banner on a standard which said: *St. Ives Fire Company, Engine No. 2, The Charybdis.* Sellew's captor was young, about his age, fragile looking, with thoughtful blue eyes.

Silently he studied Sellew. His visitor was short and dark and smoothly muscular. His brown eyes were bland, patient. The fair-haired youth said, "You don't look like a burglar, you're too young."

There it was again. Sellew said, "I'm older'n I look—but I'm no burglar. I'm part Wyandot and that fools the eye."

Slowly and woodenly, carefully choosing his words, he told about being accosted by the flabby man, about being locked in, about the suit of clothes. He told his name, his father's name, and explained that he came from the hills, out by the Pigeon Creek Country. He declared calmly that he never did care for townsmen and that from now on, if he lived to be a hundred, he'd never trust one again. He felt better when he'd finished.

The fair haired youth said, "Wait here." He left by the street door, was gone a moment, and returned. "That completely vindicates you. As you say, the cellar window is braced from the outside." He smiled and offered his hand. "I'm John Andress."

Sellew nodded. Andress asked curiously, "How did you happen to be spending the night in the empty marketplace?"

Sellew looked embarrassed. At last, he said, "I was tryin' to hold a stall fer tomorrow."

"Hold a stall?"

"That's right. Like I said, I don't want no trouble with no townsman over no stall when market opens tomorrow. So I walked in—"

"How far?"

"I hear it's eighteen miles. So I walked in today. Nancy—"

"Who's Nancy?"

"She's my wife. Nancy's bringin' the cartload of chairs in by horse. Hickory chairs, with thong bottoms, to start us off right. I been workin' on 'em for eleven months, before I got married. I cut the timber myself, shot the deer, and tanned the hides. Good tannin', too, with milk and oil o' vitriol."

"You did all this so you could get married?"

"Ain't nothin' an' it surely been worth it. I been married sinst last Tuesday." He tried to keep the boast from his voice.

"I see." Andress was impressed. "I'm single, myself. But I have plans." He changed the subject. "It's beyond me," he said slowly. "You say this fat man, this Eggers, gave you these garments, put you into my window with instructions that you hang them in my bedroom? And then locked the cellar window to force you upstairs? And you didn't see the other man? They thought the house was empty. I ate my supper in the dark, and stretched out for a nap, and they must have thought I was out. Think of it, someone simply presented me with a suit of clothes!"

"Mebbe they jest got the wrong place?"

Andress examined the garments. Waistcoat of finest satin, pantaloons of superfine broadcloth. He slipped on the jacket. "Gad! A perfect fit." He put his hand in the jacket pocket, came out with some colored papers.

Together, they inspected them. *Received of John Andress, $250 for Services Rendered, J. Farrari, Gentleman's Tailor.* The others were wine and liquor bills, super-choice spirits in generous lots, to the amount of $387, running backward over a period of months, and marked *Paid in Full, Sam'l Eggers, Prop., Drayman's Rest Hotel, 17 Hawthorne.*

"It's too much for me. I didn't buy that wine, and goodness knows, on my salary I didn't buy that splendid suit of clothes. Yet the statements are receipted, so I owe no one anything. Could it be a sell, you know, a joke?"

"It's no joke," Billie Sellew said bleakly, "when I'm tricked into house-breakin'! I think I'll jest wander down to Hawthorne Lane and talk to this Eggers feller. He should be considerable surprised—"

Andress gave him a long, hard stare. "I have to drop into the office for a moment, and then I'll be free for the evening. If you'll tag along, I'll join you."

Sellew grinned. "Certainly-sure. We'll make a team of it." Then he winced. Teaming with a townsman!

The clock on the mantel said a quarter to eleven. Andress hung the new garments in the oak armoire in his bedroom, and they went out upon the street.

JOHN ANDRESS was accountant at Lumsden and Cahill's, he explained. The firm was known in business circles mainly as Cahill's now, since Lumsden had passed away. He'd been with them for six years, was making nine dollars a week, and practically ran the business himself. Mr. Cahill had frequently hinted at a junior partnership, but somehow it had never materialized. A junior partnership would pay about twenty-five dollars a week and a man could get married and settle down on that. It was very harrying being a gentleman, even a single one, and keeping up gentlemanly contacts on nine dollars. Supporting a wife on the same sum was out of the question. He'd talked it over with a certain party but she wouldn't agree with him. What did Billie Sellew think?

Billie Sellew was extremely interested, but he had no comment.

Lumsden and Cahill's was just beyond Walnut, on Pearl. The massive door was of carved mahogany. Private banking, Sellew decided, must be a magnificent occupation. A placard in the window sedately informed the world that Steamboats were Financed herein, that Country Seats were for Sale, that Foreign Gold and Current Bank Notes were Purchased. Next to the placard was a mousetrap containing a piece of moldy cheese. Behind the trap and the placard were genteel red velvet draperies. They entered, passed down a cool hall, and entered a door at the rear.

The room was small and wainscotted, and harsh in the white glare of a sizzling Argand lamp. A middle-aged gentleman, wary-eyed, toying with a steel nibbed goose feather, sat behind a desk near a very lovely young lady in a garnet-colored frock. This, it developed, was Mr. Cahill, Andress' employer. A second man, who turned out to be a Major Chenoweth, lolled in the corner, a walkingstick across his knees; he appeared to be the young lady's escort, and seemed to be attempting to efface himself.

As Andress and Billie Sellew came through the door, Mr. Cahill said icily, "Is this the way, Mr. Andress, that you lay out the morrow's foolscap and make up the patent ink for the desk bottles?" He took a deep breath. "Who," he asked, pointing at Sellew, "—is that?"

The girl smiled at Billie—and he knew in a flash of fire that she liked him because he was with Andress. This was the girl Andress wanted to marry. He felt it in his bones. There was no doubt of it.

He sensed, too, that they'd broken into some kind of a powwow, a business powwow, between the young lady and Mr. Cahill.

Major Chenoweth was a very small man, in his late forties, sleepy-eyed and hawk-nosed; his bony skull looked pinched at the temples and he wore glossy black mustachios, Southern style. His clothes were the clothes of a Southern gentleman, too; an impoverished gentleman, frayed but unpatched or undarned. He sat poker-faced, his skinny legs stretched before him and crossed at the ankles. To while away the time, he tapped the ferrule of his walkingstick against his boot toe and each time he did this, the cane gave off a faint rattle. Billie Sellew knew it was a sword cane and that there was a dirk-blade concealed within the tube of malacca. He seemed, in a vague way, to resent the presence of young Andress but Andress, Billie noticed, was totally unaware of his attitude.

Mr. Cahill took up his pen, scribbled a few figures on a sheet of paper. "So you'd like to finance a steamboat, Miss Shally? A quite sensible decision, and I must say an uncommonly shrewd one for a charming young lady to make. Cincinnati is the gateway to the world. Nowhere on this green earth is there a combination of rivers like the Ohio and the Mississippi. Now let's see—"

John Andress gaped. "Lydia, what are you doing! Where did you get money to—?"

Miss Shally ignored him. Mr. Cahill said, "The cost, generally speaking, of a vessel of three hundred tons is about thirty-five thousand. This should carry downstream a cargo of about five hundred tons. Of course, superior accommodations run your money up. When a vessel of this size is running, she costs about two hundred dollars per day. A trip to New Or-

leans and back, of course, takes about twenty days. Did you want sole ownership, or were you thinking of a partner?"

Miss Shally looked undecided. "In your case," Mr. Cahill declared, "I'd advise it. We always have a list of captains who want to buy into a new vessel. Let's see. Thirty-five to have the vessel built, and a working capital of, say twenty-five. Divided by two. Your load would be about thirty. You say you have twelve thousand in cash. Now here's the way we'll do it—"

Miss Shally cleared her throat. "But I have a special proposition to make."

Mr. Cahill beamed. "Lumsden and Cahill are always interested in special propositions. Experience has told us that it is a good policy—"

Never once had Miss Shally spoken to young Andress, or even appeared to notice him, but an undercurrent of emotion ran between them. Andress said stiffly, "Come, Sellew."

As Andress' hand touched the doorknob, Major Chenoweth showed signs of life. His eyes gazed at the ferrule of his cane, but his lips moved, "Mr. Andress, sir, a friend of mine would like to speak with you. A Mr. F. Dorr. You'll find him at the St. Ives club rooms."

Andress looked confused. "What does Dorr want to see me about?"

Major Chenoweth said mildly, "It's most pressing," and lapsed into silence.

In the company storeroom in the basement, Sellew watched while Andress made up a jug of ink from the patent ink powders, and followed him upstairs while he filled the glass inkwells and laid out foolscap in the great front countingroom. This done, they left the building. Andress said, "I guess we'd best drop in at the St. Ives and see Dorr. It won't take a minute."

ON THE way, Sellew asked, "Who is this Major Chenoweth?"

"A very genteel gentleman from downriver, from Louisville," Andress declared. "They say he's had six meetings and always kills his man. He's quite a favorite at the St. Ives."

"What's the St. Ives?"

Young Mr. Andress was a little shocked at this question. His voice took on a slightly affected tone. "Why, the St. Ives is the town's most refined fire department. The most important young gentlemen in the city! Two engines, the *Patrick Spens* and the *Charybdis,* and the hose *Ticonderoga.* Twenty-one officers of the finest lineage. We have glees, and balls, and frolics, and now and then a *fête champêtre—"*

Billie Sellew thought of the time his uncle's cabin burned down, back on Pigeon Creek, and listened politely. There wasn't any St. Ives on hand that night. There was just two cedar buckets, eight children to man them, and Pigeon Creek, half-frozen. He asked stolidly, "Is Miss Shally and the major good friends?"

Andress said with restraint, "I don't know. Furthermore, I'm not in the position to discuss it. However—oh, fiddle-faddle!"

The St. Ives club rooms were over a bakery, on the Miami Canal, just east of Fifth. You got to them by entering a narrow passageway, crossing a rutted, filthy court, and ascending rickety backstairs. The rooms themselves were pleasant, with

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UPSET STOMACH
JUMPY NERVES
RELIEF!
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BROMO SELTZER

blue tinted plaster walls and candle chandeliers; a few club members, popinjays much overdressed to Billie Sellew's way of thinking, relaxed on the horsehair furniture reading English sporting magazines, talking art and dancing and prize-fighting. When Andress and Sellew entered, they were met with owlish stares.

Andress introduced Sellew, who was received cordially enough—but forgotten under the press of graver matters. Two young fops, apparently brothers known as F. Dorr, and T. Dorr, in waistcoats of quilted satin and skintight pants, immediately took the meeting in hand. Everyone looked solemn. Andress cocked an eyebrow, asked, "What's up?"

F. Dorr was lanky and pimpled, and exuded the scent of pomatum. He said, "Mr. Andress, sir, Major Chenoweth has honored me as his agent. He will accept your apology, sir."

Andress glared. "For what, for heaven's sake?"

"He declares the affront is too profound to express."

"Balderdash!"

The group gaped. F. Dorr said sepulchrally, "If that is your position, I am instructed to proceed as the major's second. My brother—" Here, T. Dorr, plump and rosy, nodded. "—is pleased to serve you in a similar capacity. Here, sir, are the terms—"

Andress was speechless. "Terms?"

"Of course. The meeting will be in five hours, at daybreak, in the field beyond Northridge Cemetery. The major will furnish the pistols, on his honor they will be charged smooth and singly. The meeting will be to ensure permanent satisfaction; the seconds will stand by with cases of supplementary weapons to ensure this. Parties may present from any level from hip to eye but no party may bend his knee, or cover his side with his left hand. No apology, of course, may be offered on the field. Should any party advance, or retreat, after position, the other party may advance at will, until muzzles touch, if he so desires. A snap, or a noncock is equivalent to a shot—"

Mr. Andress was appalled. "In the first place, I've offered the major no affront—"

Mr. F. Dorr looked grim. "You deny it, against his word? That, sir, is giving him the lie direct, and, according to the Clonmel Rules, is equivalent in itself to giving him a blow, or slandering him at play, or—"

"But the vehemence of the whole thing! A meeting to death—"

"The major refuses to express the affront. An unexpressed affront may be considered equivalent to a blow, or to the lie direct—!"

"But I'm the party challenged! Yet the major seems to have arranged everything, to the last detail, himself!"

"Does the Northridge site give the major an unfair advantage?"

"No, not that. But the time, for instance. In five hours! The challenged party customarily sets—"

"The major is leaving by morning stage. It's an emergency. The Code allows for such a situation."

"But the major is well known as a deadly shot. Even as challenger, he has selected pistols!"

"It's his privilege. Under the Code, he has sworn that he is ignorant of sword play."

Billie Sellew said mildly, "The major certainly knows his rules." No one heard him. Mr. F. Dorr turned to his plump brother. "Are these arrangements satisfactory with you, sir?"

Mr. T. Dorr nodded. "Perfectly, sir. I'll vouch for my principal's gentility and conduct."

F. Dorr bowed. "And I, mine, sir."

Billie Sellew said woodenly, "Mr. Andress, I've got to be gettin' on. Shall we go?"

Out on the street, Billie Sellew asked politely, "You ain't a-goin' to take up the major's dare, are you?"

"There's no way out of it." Young Andress was strained and tense. "You have no conception of the importance of these things."

"Did you insult the major?"

"Of course not. The major simply wishes to kill me. I know him now for what he really is. A professional. I've heard of the major and his ilk. A machine. No sportsmanship, no gallantry, no element of chance."

"I swear an' declare," Billie Sellew said, "—I couldn't stand city life. Ever' minute I been in town something's been happening. Take my advice and stay clean away from Northridge Cemetery tomorrow

morning." He paused, asked courteously, "Got anything else to take care of?"

Andress laughed. "Not at the moment."

"Fine. 'Cause I sure been relishin' a talk with that feller that pushed me through your cellar window." Sellew sunk into moody silence.

This wasn't right, he told himself over and over. Here he was, traipsing around, getting into trouble, messing in other folks' affairs, when he should be back in that empty marketstall, holding it down for Nancy and the chairs. . . She should be halfway to town by now. Nancy's little cousin would be on the seat too, in case a wheel should come off, and Old Frogeye, his father's horse, would be straining his harness about now on Salvation Hill. Salvation Hill was dark and wild, with its foxgrape and tangled oaks and Indian ghosts. But it wasn't as dark and wild as some of those Cincinnati sidestreets. . .

"This is Hawthorne Lane," John Andress said at last. "And there's our inn, the Drayman's Rest Hotel—!"

Billie Sellew nodded. "Leave me do the talkin'."

Too long he'd stood around, politely, and let people sprangle him up. He wanted to get this over with, and quick. If you want a thing done right, do it yourself.

HAWTHORNE LANE was a channel of rats and cats and refuse, scarcely five feet wide. Moonlight above their heads licked the bracketed tradesigns and lead eavestroughs in lavender and green, crossbarring their faces with shadows as they advanced, but the cobbles beneath their feet were obliterated in the spongy blackness. They'd almost passed the place. The warped door was set deep in the moldy brick wall. A tin lard oil lamp hanging from the lintel revealed Drayman's Rest in crude letters on the door panel, and the sign of the tavern, a rusty waggoner's bell. Sellew pressed down the iron thumblatch, and they stepped inside.

The bar-parlor was deserted—except for innkeeper Eggers, himself, who played patience at a table in the corner by the light of a candle in a demijohn. It was a foul room and dank; tin from tea canisters had been nailed over rat holes and as the wind from the nearby river seeped through the floorboards, and tossed the candle flame, the shadow of the flabby hotelman leaped and skittered across the plaster walls. Mr. Eggers had shed his embroidered waistcoat and was in his undershirt. He stared at Andress and Sellew as they approached. Instantly his pig-eyes recognized Sellew. His hand trembled with the shock. He laid down the greasy pack of cards and said, "I shorely hope you ain't come here lookin' fer trouble?"

Sellew pulled out the bench and he and Andress seated themselves across from their host. He said slowly, "No, sir. We ain't come here a-lookin' for trouble. Fact is, we're a-bringin' it with us."

Eggers took a long moment in sizing them up. He was cornered. Sweat ran down his meaty cheeks and his little eyes shifted almost like clockwork. He tried a bluff. "I hain't never see neither one o' you afore," he announced hoarsely. "An' my word is as good as your'n. Now let me tell you young chippers something. You're out'n your neighborhood, this-here's Hawthorne Lane. Run along now, an' forgit me, while you're feelin' hale an' hearty."

His hand went behind his back and came out with a sheath knife which he laid before him on the table. A wicked looking weapon, a riverman's weapon, with a five inch blade. He left it dramatically in the candlelight, said, "Either o' you young chippers ever see anything like that?"

"No," Andress said. "To be perfectly honest, I don't believe I have."

"It's a parin' knife, for potatoes," Sellew explained. "When I was a babe in a cradle they let me play with one just like it, 'cause they knowed I couldn't cut myself. When I growed up, o' course, and needed something for wear and tear, I made my own." Before they could speak, his hand was into his blouse and out, and holding a claspknife. His thumb-ball pressed the fish-fin lever and the slender sheepsfoot blade leaped out and open. Light ran along the silky steel in a glaze of silver fire.

"Now this-here's home-made," Billie Sellew said helpfully. "It wasn't turned out by no cheap factory to sell at ten or fifteen cents. Not countin' what happened in Pigeon Creek churchyard one Second-

Sunday when six Adams boys blowed up in my face, it hain't scarcely been used. Home-made knives, like home-made food, is best. I had the frame, o' course, it belonged to my pappy's brother. The handle is rosewood from an old chair leg. That chair come across the mountains a year before Braddock's Defeat. But when all is said an' done, it's the blade of a knife that gives it its sperrit."

Mr. Eggers was really sweating now. Sellew went on, "You want spring-temper and a perfect edge, an' the temper must be the same from edge to back. Forging comes first, an' you must water-hammer it. An' then you plumb it. Pass it through the blaze an' rub it with candle. Back an' forth through the blaze agin she goes till the tallow looks like it's goin' into the steel. Three times you do this, but I ain't tellin' you how long an' how hot. Then push her into the forgedust an' let her cool. Do it right, and you got a blade that'll cut milkweed or bone."

Mr. Eggers put his knife away, and Billie Sellew did likewise.

Sellew said, "Mr. Andress, this-here's the varmint that broke into your house."

Eggers was wilting. "Mr. Andress, here," Billie Sellew declared amiably, "is a member o' the St. Ives. That's a very genteel mess o' gentlemen and they could cause you a heap of grief." He paused. "I wouldn't want them on my neck. Would you?"

Bearlike, Eggers shook his head. "No. No, I wouldn't."

"Who was that man with you, when you put me through Mr. Andress' cellar window?"

"A stranger, an' that's the truth. I jest met him oncet afore."

"You gave me a suit of clothes, a new suit of clothes, and told me to hang 'em in Mr. Andress' wardrobe. In the pocket was a receipt, sayin' they'd been paid for and that the tailor lived here at the Drayman's Rest. Is that true? Does a tailor, named J. Farrari, live here—?"

"No. It was all made up."

"Also, there were wine bills, claimed to have been paid for. Did Mr. Andress ever buy three hundred dollars' worth of wine and liquor from you?"

"Them was all made up, too. But I was to swear different if it come to court."

"You were paid to do this?"

"O' course."

"Who paid you?"

Mr. Eggers was harried. He licked his lips. "I won't say. I forgit the man's name. Now leave me alone."

The young men got to their feet. As Andress reached the door, Billie Sellew turned and faced Eggers. Voicelessly, his lips formed a word, a name. Mr. Eggers nodded, almost imperceptibly. "That's who I thought," Billie Sellew said calmly.

On the street, Billie Sellew asked, "Where does Miss Shally live? Is that the Miss Shally that lives—?"

Mr. Andress' mind was on other matters. "33 King's Court," he answered absently. "Four blocks east of the courthouse. One thing that I can't understand, Sellew, is why should anyone give me a new suit of clothes? I've tackled it from every angle and it all comes to nothing."

At the corner of Broadway and Market, the young men parted. Andress said, "I better be getting home and trying a catnap before I meet the major." He shook hands. "Goodnight, Sellew. You've made a friend."

Billie Sellew said softly, "I'll see you at the duel."

"What about your chairs?"

"I guess I'll just have to trust to Providence that Nancy finds a stall. You're goin' to need me." The decision was almost too much for him.

He stood in the shadow of a doorway and watched John Andress' fragile body disappear into the blackness of the night. He waited a bit, and then started at a leisurely pace for 33 King's Court and the home of Miss Lydia Shally. He hoped Miss Shally hadn't gone to bed. City folks, he'd heard, stayed up till one and sometimes later.

Folks from Pigeon Creek sometimes stayed up, too. Nancy, somewhere along the road with the cartload of chairs, was riding the night out. He wondered if she'd had trouble with that left-rear wheel. It wasn't any too stout.

KING'S COURT was a row of tiny brick cottages, white painted, on a flagstoned backstreet. The moon was high now, among the distant chimneypots, and the sidewalk and street was deserted except for a horse and buggy before num-

ber 33. Number 33, itself, was dark. As Billie Sellew approached the buggy he saw that it contained Major Chenoweth. The major appeared to have just ended a very pleasant evening; he lolled on the horsehair seat, his beaver on the back of his head, his boot propped on the whip socket, enjoying the faint river breeze. He turned fishy eyes on Sellew as the young man advanced; Sellew said in his best yokel fashion. "Howdy, major. I been lookin' all over town for you."

Major Chenoweth took a segar and a friction match from his waistcoat. He struck the lucifer on the sole of his boot and in the flare of sulphur Sellew saw the hole in the bootsole, the hole as big as a five cent piece he'd seen from the cellar window. Annoyed, the major asked, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I've just come from Mr. Eggers, at the Drayman's Rest, an' I want to ask you some questions."

The major's nerves were like iron. He looked up and down the street, came to a decision, changed his mind. Finally he picked up the reins. "Anything to oblige," he declared agreeably. "I am rather rushed at the moment. I have an affair of honor at the Northridge Cemetery in a few hours. See me there, at four-thirty sharp, we'll see what's what. All right?"

Sellew said, "Yes, sir." The major shook the reins and the mare pulled away from the curb and clipped down the street at a canter.

The duel was at five, not four-thirty, and in the field behind the cemetery, not in the cemetery itself. The major was indeed a busy man. He had appointments.

Sellew stood on the doorstep of 33 and dropped the knocker thrice on its brass escutcheon. After a bit he saw candlelight through the polychrome fan window of the door, and the door opened. Miss Lydia Shally, in dressingrobe and paisley shawl, said, "Yes?" And then she recognized him. "You're the gentleman who was with John—?"

"That's right, ma'am." It was the first time in his life Billie Sellew had ever been ranked with the gentry. "I surely hate to get you out o' bed this way but it looks like John Andress is—"

"He's not hurt!"

"No, ma'am. And he won't be if we handle it right. I just want to get some things straight. I saw you tonight at the bank with Major Chenoweth. You love him?"

She looked horrified. "Of course not."

"You love John Andress?"

"Yes," she said defiantly. "I do."

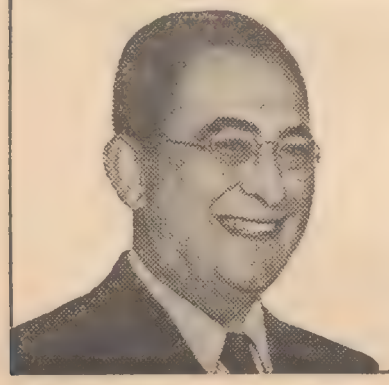
"When you was at the bank tonight, you was tryin' to buy into a steamboat. John come out an' said you didn't have the money to bring it off. Have you?"

"Yes. I have the house here and ten thousand dollars. My aunt left me ten thousand dollars to take the Grand Tour."

Sellew looked blank. Miss Shally explained. "Every cultivated young lady takes the Grand Tour. A year or so in Europe studying the fine arts and the niceties of deportment. It's an obligation we owe to our future husbands."

"Then why are you swappin' it for a steamboat?"

She said slowly, "I told Mr. Cahill I had a proposition. That I'd finance a steamboat through him, if he'd give John



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that promotion he's been on the verge of offering for so long. I knew that my ten thousand wasn't a drop in the bucket to Lumsden and Cahill, but Mr. Cahill was very polite about it. I didn't say so, but I thought that someone had better step in and take action. I think it's going to work, too. He was certainly extremely flattered."

"And you own a steamboat," Billie Sellew added. He grinned goodnight and left.

Billie Sellew sat on the wrought iron bench just within the cemetery gate, and watched the road beyond for Major Chenoweth's buggy. The sky was clouding up and in the darkness he could barely make out the piebald glow of chalky tombstones scattered about the soft turf. There was the smell of woodsflowers and the sound of night birds. In the field beyond the picket fence, the field where the duel was to be held, river mist lay in ghostly layers over the ironweed and lambsquarter. When the major's buggy came, it came without lights and quietly, and Sellew almost missed it as its shadowy hulk moved towards him down the grassy road. He got to his feet and approached it.

Major Chenoweth had alighted, and was standing by the shaft, searching the shadows as he came up. The major said with relief, "Oh, there you are. I was afraid you might not come. What's this about Eggers, and just who are you anyway?"

Sellew said quietly, "I was afraid you wouldn't show up, too. I'm just the country boy you an' Mr. Eggers put through that cellar window. It took me all night to get this thing straightened out, but now I've got it figgered." His voice was soft now, and casual. "Leave town, Major Chenoweth, and right now. Cincinnati hain't needin' you no longer."

He was watching the major's right hand, so he was nearly caught offguard. For the major was stroking the mare's rump with his left, and the pistol had been thrust into the harness, under the hip strap. The major brought it out. Sellew lunged, throwing his body sidewise. The gun went off by his ear, like a hellish blow, deafening him, and they were on the ground, rolling around together in the dewy grass.

His knee on the major's chest, and his hands pinning the major's wrists to the earth, Sellew said, "Major Chenoweth, go back to Louisville." He spoke loudly, without realizing it, for his ears were still ringing. He got to his feet quickly, panting heavily.

The major stood up. Wordlessly, he brushed the grass from his pantaloons, got into the buggy and drove off without a backward glance.

The sky above the osage hedge was showing the first streaks of dawn. Sellew left the cemetery and took up his wait in the field beyond.

THE carriages that came now carried lights. They were not hired rigs, like the major's, but were gentleman's carriages, glossy and trim. They entered the field and pulled up in the ironweed in a semicircle. This, Billie Sellew knew, was the end. The end of the long night, and the end of something else, too.

John Andress alighted from his buggy, and Mr. Cahill, the banker, and F. Dorr and T. Dorr carrying pistol cases and medical kits. They came forward and were joined by other young men, members, Sellew guessed, of the St. Ives.

Mr. F. Dorr asked solemnly, "Has my principal, Major Chenoweth, arrived as yet?"

"He's been here, an' left," Sellew said placidly. "And he won't be back. I'll wager the next time you see him, if you ever do, he'll be usin' a different name, too."

There was a stunned silence.

After a moment, Billie Sellew addressed Mr. Cahill. "Mr. Cahill, what you doin' here? You allow your hired help, like John Andress, to take part in duels?"

Mr. Cahill said stiffly, "I was young once myself. And an affair of honor, properly conducted—"

Sellew laughed. "Properly conducted."

Mr. Cahill frowned. "I fail to see any humor in—"

"Well, this one has surely been properly conducted—an' you done the conductin'!" Sellew's face was bleak. "Mr. Cahill, sir, I charge you with plannin' and schemin' to kill your bookkeeper, John Andress!"

Andress was thunderstruck. "Sellew, have you lost your mind?"

Sellew shook his head. "Mr. Cahill thimble-rigged this whole business." His dark eyes burned with anger. "Mr. Cahill paid the major an' Eggers to hide them clothes an' stuff in your house. I don't know why, but he did. The major was to kill you in a duel an' then the stuff would be found. I thought Mr. Cahill was mighty excited underneath when you showed up at the bank tonight. You tangled him up by takin' that nap. He'd told Eggers that you'd be at the bank, out of your house, layin' out foolscap and fillin' inkwells at the office."

Mr. Cahill said pompously, "I refuse to stand here, on a cold hillside at dawn, and listen to—"

"Threaten Eggers with a warrant for burglary," Billie Sellew said to Andress, "and he'll talk. He'll tell you that Cahill paid him and the major to—"

Mr. Cahill beamed. "You young fellows are too keen for me! Now, I admit it. It was a hoax, John. A prank. The major was merely to test your mettle. Take it like a good chap with a grin. No harm done, eh?"

John Andress thought a long time before he answered. Finally, he said, "No harm done, eh? I wonder." Slowly and carefully, he went on, "Say someone, like Mr. Cahill for instance, had been looting the company, embezzling. Say someone in position of power had been taking money from the company's funds. Say this person had been thinking it over and had decided on a foolproof method to avoid exposure. Alter the ledgers and eliminate the bookkeeper. Eliminate the bookkeeper and leave him with a bad reputation. Leave him with fancy clothes and wine bills, with evidence that he'd been living beyond his frugal means."

Mr. Cahill was suddenly desperate. "John, don't talk that way—before witnesses! You're soon to become a junior partner. Any irregularity, should any turn up, can be explained—"

"Let's go to the office," John Andress said, "and look over the records. These gentlemen can act as observers. Well, Sellew, it looks as though you've saved Miss Shally, among others, a great deal of money."

Billie Sellew said, "I'll ride with you as far as the marketplace. I've got to hold a stall before the crowd starts comin' in this morning."

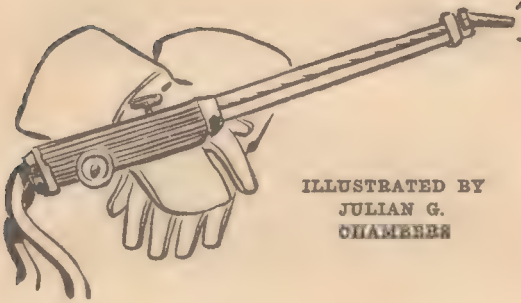
The farmers were just beginning to assemble and to his surprise there were many stalls still open, many good ones. He selected the best and settled down to enjoy the hubbub. Chickens squawked from their crates, children bellowed and scampered and hallooed. Countrymen in homespun shifted great hampers of tomatoes about and sides of beef and baskets of fruit. Little boys traded fishhooks, and little girls traded buttons. A blind man played dance tunes on a fiddle and a little terrier with a paper cap on his head stood at attention by a Delft collection plate. Everyone was having a good time. It was about six o'clock when Nancy arrived finally.

She saw him first and waved. The sunlight was very beautiful on her butter yellow hair and she seemed as fresh as a lark. She was so pretty that he could hardly realize that she was his wife. As she helped him unload the chairs, she asked solicitously, "How did you sleep, Billie?"

"Not very well," he said good-humoredly. "I'll be very, very glad to get back home."

By

COLEMAN MEYER



ILLUSTRATED BY JULIAN C. CHAMBERS

MAYBE everything *isn't* written in a book. For a while I thought it was. So did young Dud Terry, but of course young Dud's convictions came from that stubbornness of twenty-four, a post-graduate course in production administration and a father with too much money. Mine came from trying to build too many boats with too few people.

However, if you'd asked either of us whether the conversion would be brought about by a hundred and twenty-pounds of white-haired, mild-mannered little guy with a lump of tobacco perpetually in his cheek, we'd have given you book at eight to five that you were wrong. And taken all the money in sight.

I guess that's about what Johnny Riley weighed—complete with leather jacket and heavy burning gloves.

It was a few years after the first war when Johnny first came to work for me. We were knocking down battleships. The easy way—with little soft knives of flame. Knives that chewed through ten inches of armor plate like it was overheated butter. Armor plate that sent up a lead-paint stink you never quite got out of your nostrils, respirator or none.

It was a man's business. No mistake on that. Take 500 feet of boat that you're whittling down to life-raft size for scrap

The torch flared as the scalpel-keen jet of oxygen sliced through the steel.

SCRAP PILE

steel. Burners all over it like bees in a hive. And tons of steel, whole decks at a time, falling as a blue flame ate through the last girder. If the steel didn't break you up outside and swiftly, the blue-white smoke of boiling paint worked at your insides more slowly but just as surely. Sometimes the hospital had more men than the yard.

Johnny was a boomer-burner. A little leather-faced chap with that odd pallor that comes of too many days inhaling lead fumes. He'd come up looking for a job and asking for it in a mild, off-hand manner that narrowed my eyes.

"Know one end of a torch from the other?"

"Maybe." He spat tobacco juice accurately beyond the second step of the little wooden dock office, shifted a mitten and a fingered glove beneath his arm.

"Maybe?" I had some "maybe" guys on the job now. They were scratching their heads over how to get a bull-wheel off the winch on the second deck without using dynamite. The torches hadn't touched it so far.

"Come on," I said briefly. We made the gangplank to the second deck. I pointed to the eight-foot bull-wheel. It was a toothed cog of awesome dimensions, scarred here and there where giant torches had failed to do more than put a fiery thumbprint in the gray metal. "Malleable," I pointed.

"Uh-huh," he answered easily, looked at the wheel for a moment. The serpentine of acetylene hoses writhed on the iron deck. Torches hung in profusion. "What's the matter?" he asked mildly. "Can't you cut it?"

"*They* can't," I corrected coldly. "I might as well have a box of matches instead of cutting torches for all the good it does. I'm letting them puzzle this one out."

His mild brown eyes interrogated the deck from beneath shaggy brows, saw a piece of steel rod. He slipped the gloves from beneath his arm, borrowed a lighter and a pair of black goggles from one of the boys.

It was when he snapped the lighter that I said, "Hired!" Only I said it to myself. There's a trick the old-timers have in lighting a torch, not scratching the lighter flint across the file in front of the tip where it gets carboned up and useless after a few times. He had the acetylene on with one practiced finger and the lighter snapped smartly against the tip in a slanting slice. The torch flared white, drew up immediately to a blue pencil as his ready finger caught the oxygen valve. I nodded approvingly. That kept the greasy tendrils of acetylene soot from hanging on the roof and ultimately on yourself.

The hissing blue flame picked a rough edge of the wheel spoke, splattered just the right amount for a quick heat, glowed red in an instant. The steel rod was poised by the cutting tip, torch and cutting trigger in his gloved palm ready for a one-hand squeeze. Then he fed the rod in, caught the melt and squeezed.

Ten minutes later the spoke parted with a grudging snap.

"You gotta flux 'em when they ain't steel," he offered casually as he lifted the dark glasses.

HE WAS with me from that point on. We went from scrapping up to forge work; Diesel crankshafts, great blocks of solid steel two feet thick, a battery of oxygen bottles with electric heat on the regulator to keep it from freezing drum-tight. Torch tips with a cutting jet the size of your little finger. And Johnny would slice the blocks out as though they'd been machined.

It was work for an artist. Those blocks represented three thousand dollars' worth of work under a steam hammer when he put the heat to them. One hanger, an uncut skip of metal at the base of the cut, one wobble of the torch that would make a hole the size of your fist inside the slice and the inspector's "Chuck it!" would send three thousand dollars to rust in the scrap park.

Then there was high work, skyscrapers and a few bridges. . . And then suddenly a guy named Hitler became more than a funny little man with a mustache. And I found myself with a crew of three thousand at Coast Shipyards. I also found myself with Dud Terry.

That wasn't the way his family said it. They said Dudley Willingham Terry the Third. But Dudley the Second had more on the ball than two strikes after his name. He had enough to get RFC or WAA or

something with initials to hang shipyards and cranes like Christmas tree ornaments wherever there was a flat spot with water.

The draft being what it was, it was inevitable there'd be a job for Dudley the Third. I got him—as Executive Assistant. I was prejudiced when I heard the news. That didn't last long.

He was a nice kid with a pair of shoulders that looked good even *without* the football pads. He'd done more than forward pass his way through college. The Phi Beta Kappa key said he'd read books. Maybe too many. The Old Man brought him over to me, scowled and said, "He's yours, Paul. For a little while. Until I sell his mother on the Army. Maybe wet behind the ears yet. But he's good stock."

He was good stock, fresh, keen. An Eager Beaver. And he was going to revolutionize the industry in a day.

The three thousand were all types, kids fresh out of school with leather clothes and arc welding hoods with their name painted just above the cover glass, kinds who talked polarity and amperes—and who could just barely tack a weld! There were girls with bandannas on their heads —girls who could run electric-driven cutting machines with keen precision—and who couldn't clean a cutting tip. Then there were guys like Johnny.

I put him in charge of the school. Johnny was a gas man. He scorned the arc hood, looked on humming generators with distaste. For him there was no music except that which came from a steadily hissing flame scissoring through steel.

Young Dud was on General Supervision which took in Johnny's trainees, a fact I suddenly realized when he came into my office with a handful of papers that would fill a dragline bucket.

"Paul—this trainee set-up. We've got to do something."

"Do something? I thought we were doing it. Johnny seems to be turning out some pretty fair boys—and girls."

"That's just it." He flattened the papers on my desk. "I've talked with Johnny. And it hasn't done any good."

"What's wrong?"

"This." He ran a finger over a graph line on the paper. "We lose a hundred and thirty people a week. The school produces a hundred. Pretty soon there won't be a guy in the yard who knows how to light a torch. I told Johnny we've got to push them out faster and all he does is spit tobacco juice and say, 'You can't make a good burner in six days!' "

I nodded. I knew he was right. I also knew that Johnny was right. My labor requisitions were ahead of my supply and every leaderman in the yard was screaming that his men had to stand around waiting for burners. "Well," I began slowly, "he's right—"

"Maybe so," Dud said stubbornly. "But he's making them too good. Why—he's actually making every one of them start with hand torches and learn flame-cutting theory before they get to machine cutting. It isn't whether you agree with what I think; the one thing you can't argue with is the chart. And it shows we'll be fresh out of burners before long!"

"I suppose you want these kids shoved through?" Johnny's voice was diffident. He shifted the lump from his right cheek to his left, mild eyes taking in Dud calmly.

I shrugged. "The charts seems to show something. What do you think?"

"I think—" he walked to the door, opened it, spat carefully—"that when they get outa *this* school they know their job!"

"But, production—" young Dud started to steam.

"Production hell," Johnny interrupted without inflection. "You go by the number of guys working. You don't count the number standing by with portable grinders to clean up ragged work. Or the sledgehammer crews waiting to knock plates loose because they don't cut clean. And you don't count the lost time in hospitals from poor-work accidents." The brown eyes squinted at me squarely. "Mebbe I'm old-fashioned, Paul. You want I should get off the job?"

"Relax," I countered gruffly. "We left all the rest of them together, didn't we?"

The door opened. The lad coming in hesitated when he saw the three of us, looked somewhat embarrassed when he recognized Johnny. He started to back out.

"Yes?" I said.

"I—I—" he gulped, then plunged ahead. "I wanted to get my time, Mr. Glover."

"Time?" Johnny broke in. "You just finished the course."

"I know, Johnny, and I'm sorry. But I just passed a journeyman test and I can

go right to work at Bel-Air Yard—if you'll give me a work clearance."

Johnny's shoulders slumped a little at the words. He was silent for a moment then he said quietly, "O.K., son. I'll speak with Paul—Mr. Glover. You'll get it." The lad backed out the door.

"That's what I'm talking about," Dud commented dryly. "We make journeymen for every yard in the area. Now if you shove them—"

Johnny's head shook stubbornly. "It's all for the same war," he muttered in interruption. "When they leave my school they are going to know their job." He shuffled out the door.

Young Dud's gaze caught mine inquiringly, read an answer there that tightened his lips. He had the Old Man's stubbornness. Suddenly he smiled. He had another of the Old Man's characteristics: never fight a lost cause but turn it to advantage. "O.K.," he said abruptly. "If Johnny wants to continue the way he's running and you approve, do you think he'd mind if we expanded the school and I ran another section to supplement it?"

"Hell, no! Johnny's no crusader. He'll do his job the way he sees it. You can set up a hundred schools and he won't trip over a single foot of hose!"

"Good! I've prepared a burner's manual—"

"Spare me the details. You're on your own."

DUD WAS an organizer. In six weeks he'd filched a building, staffed and equipped it and was really pouring the youngsters out. A month later the labor requisition file was clean, stripped to a bare box from the steady stream of fresh faces that poured from the gray building, leather-panted, mittened and with torches in hand.

Johnny had just come into the office and hadn't even said hello when Dud entered, cast a look at the red file box, nodded. "These kids are doing all right," he announced in a tone that might have been a barnyard salutation to the morning sun. "They make mistakes but, even so, there's enough of them to correct errors and still come out ahead." There was perhaps a slight bit of triumph in the glance he bent on Johnny. It changed to faint truculence as Johnny's white thatch shook. "What's the matter?" he demanded.

"It's not good, Dud," Johnny offered without heat, a tiny wrinkle of worriment above his shaggy brows. "I just took a walk through the Yard. These boys of yours are hurting men; they're cutting through blind sheets without looking to see if men are on the other side. Over on the Pre-Fab Skids I saw three manholes cut in flat plate but the hangers hadn't let the plate fall. Somebody'll step on those cutouts, they'll let go and you'll have another man hospitalized."

"Ahhh—" Dud scoffed. "We're building ships. You can't have an omelet without breaking eggs. With thirty thousand men in any one place there's bound to be accidents."

Johnny's silver thatch dissented. "It isn't only that. Someday you'll need a boy who knows how to handle a torch properly, a boy who can cut heavy steel or take out a rivet clean. This production—"

Dud's grin followed his retreating back. "Stubborn old codger," he said indulgently. "Just because it came from a book. . ."

A couple of days later right at shift-changing time Dud's gray tweed showed at the office. "Come on over, Paul," he invited. "I want to show you something." We went out to the ways where a huge, four-legged traveling crane threw a spidery shadow over the skids. "We're pulling down this old Whirly Crane," he explained. "It's a complete crew of kids. There isn't an old-timer in the group. We're trying to save all the pieces by burning out the rivets so we can re-erect over by the plate shop. Johnny said it would be a three-weeks job. This crew's been on for four days."

We climbed the walkway, stood aside a moment as a grimy-faced youth came down the landing platform at the halfway station. "It's coming along O.K., Mr. Terry," he said proudly.

Dud said, "Good boy, Dick," as we ascended the sixty feet to the top platform where the great thirty-foot circular rail supported the revolving cab. I looked at the giant counterbalance, twenty tons of steel washers supported below the cab in an immense steel box. Hose serpentined everywhere.

Dud was scurrying around the top, scanning the lattice-work of riveted steel bars

that held the spider legs and superstructure together. I looked—once. The lattice-work was short, flat bars that criss-crossed between the stanchions, each flame-pocked where the rivets had been.

"Dud. These rivets aren't out! They're holed but that's all. The shell is still in. You shouldn't let these boys take out so many this way. Every cross strip should come free as soon as the rivet is burned. Why—this whole thing could collapse—"

There was no answer. I turned my head to see Dud gazing below, between the thirty-foot span of the crane legs. A tractor was drawing a wheeled trailer with a vast load of double-bottom plates down the roadway and through the crane uprights. It was a tight squeeze and he was going too fast. Just free of the crane the driver swerved. The overhang of plate caught the crane leg. Then I don't know what happened. . .

The noise was over and somehow, although I couldn't move, my eyes took in a dim forest of crumpled plates and legs and the shattered woodwork of the cab. A whistle was screeching short, sharp impatient blasts. There was a siren in the background, voices in the foreground.

Finally the mental fog lifted enough to tell me that it was the floor of the crane cab above. Apparently the crane had simply fallen apart at the nudge of the trailer-borne plates when a thousand skimpily holding rivets let go. Something was on my chest. My hand groped out, touched flesh. I *could* turn my head.

It was young Dud. Flat on his back. His voice came up, surprisingly calm. "You O.K., Paul? Something—" his tone held a pain-wince—"is on my arm. It's heavy. I can't feel anything."

"Don't try to move," I snapped. "This stuff is piled up like spaghetti on end. One quiver may bring it all down!" I lay still, found I could breathe, but the weight on my chest made it numb.

A voice reached us through the crumpled steel forest. "Paul—you O.K.? How about Terry?" I recognized the brusque tones of Coggins from the Hospital Staff. "Can you reach over to Terry? Get your fingers on his arm. What's holding him?"

"It's apparently the cab edge," I said after a while. "The arm isn't smashed flat but there isn't a chance of getting him loose until the cab comes up a little."

Coggins was used to emergencies. The yard police were apparently around. "Clear out! All of you!" he crisped. "You—in the leather suit. A burner?" I saw the flare of torch-light even as a voice assented. It was Dick, the grimy-faced youth we'd met on the landing. "We'll have to cut 'em out," Coggins explained. "For God's sake, be careful! One wrong slice may drop this whole pile on them!"

SOMEWHERE in the pile a pinpoint of steel glowed, then funneled flame as the torch bored through. I followed the line of the cut with my eyes, saw it run steadily sideways. Funneling flame died.

The blue flame hunted another edge, blew liquid iron. Another and still another. Still nothing shifted. Coggin's voice had an edge now. "Steel, son, steel! For God's sake, get it loose. It's four o'clock now!" I didn't get the significance of that remark until later.

Dick's answering "O.K." was uncertain. The torch bit again. Sliced across a beam. The straw-piled steel shifted with a hell of a clang as the beam parted. I held my breath. Nothing heavy fell.

Then the hissing torch brought light to the dim cab base. A leather-jacketed youngster wriggled through. "Thank God!" he breathed. Young Dud opened his eyes gamely. His pain-wreathed lips mouthed a stiff "O.K." as he met my gaze.

The shattered cab had given us the ride down and, I guess, broke the fall. It was twisted at a crazy angle, turned three-quarters on its side, the sharp edge of the twenty-ton counterweight resting across his forearm and held off from crushing contact by something wedged beneath.

The lattice-work had me boxed in so I couldn't do a great deal more than move my head to watch Coggins' white jacket come through the hole. I saw him bend swiftly over Dud's arm, feel under the weight, glance at his watch. "Better get the other crane," I suggested. "Pick this stuff up a piece at a time from the top—"

"And you'll have a guy with only one arm coming out!" the hospital man crisped. "His circulation is cut off!"

I said "Oh!" Scanned the scene as best I could. The beams over me formed part of the boom opposite the counterbalance. The thirty-foot turning rail for the cab was tilted parallel to the cab base, formed

(Continued on page 145)

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

Faster than the eye could follow, McCargo's right hand shot forward and clamped tight behind the diamond-shaped head.

OLD Cap Sparhawk had a thousand and one yarns to spin about McCargo. He'd spread his behind in the deacon seat of the Steamboat Hotel and talk for hours without interrupting himself once—except to spit at the pot-bellied stove.

A yarn that tickled his funny-bone started like this:

"Well, sir, after I cinched the Battle of Lake Erie for Commodore Perry, Andy Jackson asked me to give him a hand down to New Orleans. The Lobsterbacks under Ginral Packenham figured they'd take the town by storm in time for a quick snack of pralines and Creoles, but I ups with Ole Betsy—and the rest is hist'ry.

"Jackson called me into his headquarters afterwards. 'Sparhawk,' he says, 'when you picked off Packenham, you took the heart out of the British invasion. That was as pretty a shot as I've seen since my last duel. Clean through the left eye at three hundred yards!'

"Well, sir, I had to hang my head in shame, but, being a truthful cuss, I spoke

By
WILLIAM RATIGAN

CAPTAIN McCARGO'S DILEMMA

right up. 'Ginral Jackson,' I says, 'we might as well face facts. I aimed for his *right* eye!'

"Old Hickory was a tactful man and he changed the subject real quick. 'I wonder how those Lobsterbacks'll get Packenham's body back to England for a decent burial?' he asked me, and I told him.

"And that reminds me of the time the milk of human kindness sort of curdled on McCargo . . ."

But it wouldn't do to put the story in Sparhawk's words because they'd blister paper and make a printer's devil blush. So, here's the yarn, all slicked up and curried down for the carriage trade.

AT TWO bells of the midnight watch, with the *Minong* close-reefed to weather a gale, Captain Thunder Bay McCargo received warning that they were in for worse trouble than the onrushing storm.

Cormac stirred in his sleep beside the helm. His paws churned the charged air as if his dreams were demon-haunted. He whined and sprang awake, the hackles bristling along his back in a porcupine ridge of terror.

McCargo kept both hands locked on the twisting spokes of the wheel and braced his legs against the swoop and swerve of rambunctious seas. But he made his voice as soothing a bellow as ever came from Bull o' Bashan. "Easy does it, lad! What's wrong?"

For answer, the Irish wolfhound lifted his nose to the black-bellied clouds that were swallowing the last ear of the moon. His howl was a banshee's wail.

A knife of fear quivered in McCargo's heart. Only once before had Cormac howled—during the past winter when Prudence lay at Death's elbow with lung sickness. But now her cheeks must be pink as the June teaflowers, with a deeper blush for the kicking life in her womb that a little more than a month would . . .

Again the banshee wailed, and the knife stabbed. A gust shook the *Minong's* fifty tons from bowsprit to taffrail. In the hold, heavy hogsheads of prime Jamaica destined for thirsty Mackinac creaked and gurgled.

"All hands on deck!" The wind whistled the words from McCargo's teeth, but Black Pompey and Red Massasauga tumbled up from below. In red turban and billowing trousers, the mountainous Negro lunged forward like the aroused guard in a Sultan's harem. Stately as tall timber, the Indian followed, stripped for action down to bear-claw necklace and breech-clout.

"Hoist every stitch of sail!" At McCargo's command, Black Pompey's eyes rolled white in the darkness and African mumbo-jumbo shaped his lips, but he leaped to obey. With ceremonial gestures, Red Massasauga offered a twist of tobacco to Lake Huron, his prayer and bribe to the angry god of waters.

"Lively, me buckos!" roared McCargo. "By the dirty brows of Donegal's mountains, we'll not be riding out this storm—we'll be riding her in!"

The wind drove, blood lightning spurred the flanks of the sky, and thunder cracked its bullwhip as the *Minong* raced toward Beldorado, climbing the crests of waves that towered closer to the blindfolded stars than the steeple of Saint Anne's in Detroit. And the mermaid on the schooner's bow swam in a boiling cauldron of spray.

At rumbling dawn, the main sticks were still in her, but her deck showed a shambles of splintered spars and ragged canvas. An orange-haired colossus fought the bucking helm—and the beat of panic in his pulse.

Noon punctured the clouds, and like a wounded swan the *Minong* raised her wings over the bar at Beldorado, ghosted up the channel—a white whisper on the water—and breasted the wharf.

So quietly did McCargo issue orders that the Negro and the Indian had to stretch their ears. "Chop away the wreckage and make her shipshape. But, gently, lads, gently! Every swing of the axe strikes *me*."

He strode ashore, his earring dancing a golden jig, for he thought he recognized Prudence among the figures in homespun straggling toward the landing. But his eyes were wishing-wells.

Whiskers sidled up and plucked nervously at the fringed sleeve of McCargo's buckskin shirt. He spat words as if he had a bad taste in his mouth and wanted it out in a hurry. "Got some tarnation news fer ya, Cap'n. Your wife fell heavy on a rock yes'd'y, stumbled over a root. Didn't think no great shakes of it until 'long

'bout noon-a-night, and then . . . Hey, Cap'n! There's more I got to tell ya! Hold on!"

A breath of balsam drowsed across the stumped clearing, buttered with wood violets. A feathered bluecoat piped his flute as Nature, in a final fling of irony, saddled the horizon with a rainbow. At the deerskin door of a log cabin, McCargo took off his beaver as if entering church.

Two candles licked against the gloom where she stretched—"laid out" in her best gown on the bunk. He blinked at the shell of death, and the room surged with memories.

This was the Prudence Meade who had disguised herself as a gentleman dandy and sidewheeled up the lakes last autumn on Captain Sparhawk's *Prairie Dew*—the Prudence who had been anything but prudent and whom he had married for the lilt in her voice . . . and to spike one of Sparhawk's Rabelaisian jests . . . and to save the New York girl's reputation.

During the swift months of their marriage, the Great Lakes had rocked and rolled with belly-laughs because Old Sparhawk had never questioned the hairlessness of "Mr. Meade's" chin or the fullness of his shirt bosom, and because, said the sailor yarns from the Erie Canal to the Rapids of Saint Mary's, young Cash-and-Carry McCargo would do anything—even commit matrimony—to round out a singing quartet for the *Minong*.

But these were the bitter dregs of the joke: waxen cheeks and a shroud.

He cradled the body in his arms, carried it out into sunlight that smarted his eyes, and headed blindly for the wharf. Whiskers dogged his steps. "Got a pine-board box all fixed for her coffin, and the hole is dug. Don't do to delay a funeral these hot days."

"I'm thanking you, but I'll not be needing the coffin, and it's to McCargo Cove on Isle Royale I'm taking her."

***Carrying the body in his arms, McCargo stepped aboard the* Minong.**

Whiskers hopped around him like a scolding jaybird. "But, Cap'n, you can't carry her 'way up there north of the moon. She won't . . . keep!"

McCargo stepped aboard the *Minong* and Whiskers started to follow him, but his foot froze in mid-air over the rail when Cormac let out a cavernous grumble. "My God!" He scrambled back from the Irish wolfhound. "That's the first time I ever been growled at by a horse!" From the safer distance, he pleaded, "Now, looky here, Cap'n, there's somethin' else I gotta tell ya!"

But McCargo was down in the hold, deaf to the world. When he finally came up, his arms were empty but the smell of the Jamaica was on him.

Warm and rich as his native savannahs came Black Pompey's voice: "Sorrow is a sundown thing—" the ebony cheeks glistened—"and a lonesome road."

Red Massasauga's face, painted with charcoal to show his grief, betrayed no inner emotion. "A brave's arrowhead," he grunted, "must be hardened in fire."

Cormac nuzzled his master's palm where the livid *S.S.* seared deep into the flesh by a smoking Pensacola iron, branded him a Slave-Stealer. But the dog's ears were cocked toward a nearby cabin where lilacs bloomed in the doorway, and, as a scream split the clearing, he bolted from the deck in full cry, with McCargo and the crew of the *Minong* at his heels.

The scent of lilacs always would bring back the scene: a girl with a face blanched to birch-bark, switching her skirts as if to shoo away danger; a crazed dog pawing and prancing just out of reach of the Thing; a baby's crib built low to shove under the bed at night; and, above it, Coiled Murder from crimson flicker of tongue to deadly rattle of tail.

"Down, Cormac! Stand clear, everybody!" McCargo blocked the doorway.

"I'll git a gun," quavered Whiskers.

But there would be no time to fetch a gun, and the use of any other weapon would further endanger the life of the child. One chance remained. In his madcap teens on the Continent, McCargo had coaxed a Cockney snake-charmer at Bartholomew Fair to show him the trick of it . . . "Loike tyking sweets from a weanling, Guv, but 'ere's to yer werry good 'ealth, cuz yer first mistyke is yer last!"

The baby in the crib cooed and reached for the sound of the rattle. In that instant, McCargo whipped a red bandanna from his pocket and fluttered it with his left hand near the swaying stalk of death.

Hooded eyes glittered with baleful fires, unhinged jaws gave wide play to brimming fangs. Like a thunderbolt, the snake struck at the taunting cloth.

But, faster than eye could follow or Massasauga could turn, McCargo's right hand shot forward and clamped tight behind the diamond-shaped head. Snared at the climax of its five-foot spring, the snake writhed and lashed to break the grip. Muscles convulsed, tail whirring, maddened maw agape, and the bandanna streaming from its envenomed fangs like a hemorrhage, McCargo hurled it through the door.

As it slithered to the ground, Red Massasauga's tomahawk flashed. "My brother sleeps," chanted the Indian, "but bad dreams will make him squirm until the sun-god sinks in the Lake of the Illinois."

When gun-flourishing Whiskers burst into the cabin, trembling reaction shook McCargo. "By the Brug of the Boyne," he exploded, "here's fine care and protection for a babe! Who's responsible for this poor, neglected sprat?"

"What I been tryin' ta tell ya!" complained Whiskers. "He's yourn!"

McCargo's jaw clicked against his collarbone. The girl lost her birch-bark pallor and giggled until her cheeks bloomed arbutus-pink. Whiskers snickered like a Shetland pony.

Cormac stood guard by the crib, his tail a churning propeller. McCargo went to his knees, murmuring an age-old ritual: "My son, my son!"

DAINTY as the down on a dandelion, an orange fuzz decked the baby's head. Smaller than a lady's beauty patch, a strawberry birthmark pricked the left shoulder as if Nature had tried to tattoo a ship's anchor.

Lost in wonder, McCargo studied the restless, cooing seed of his loins. "Wrinkled as a winter apple—" in an awed whisper—"and forty seconds smaller than a minute!"

"If that isn't just like a man!" The girl tossed her head. "It's a bouncing eight pounds he weighs—and him over a month

before his time, with a bare ten hours' start in the world! Be making no mistake about it either—he'll be the boss from now on!"

"Cap'n," blurted Whiskers, "you've got troubles!"

The baby curled its hand around McCargo's finger. "Troubles?", laughed the master of the *Minong*. "And me with a king's ransom in the crib?"

"Troubles," repeated Whiskers. "Our cow's dead, and there ain't another within milking distance between Pointe aux Barques and the Straits of Mackinaw."

"Cows!" scoffed the girl. "What a baby needs is breast-feeding!"

McCargo stood up and stared at her. She was a saucy wench with an impudent nose and a figure that teased the eye.

And she could read his mind! "I would if I could," danced her dimples, "but I'm not married and haven't done anything I shouldn't."

"Ain't a woman in camp can give suck," frowned Whiskers. "Mrs. Cash is expectin', but she won't come in fresh afore two weeks at soonest."

So that's why the *Minong* jiffied out of Beldorado and pointed her bowsprit toward Mackinac Island in search of a wet-nurse. She cut the waves like a Baltimore Clipper on a record run around Cape Horn to the Golden Gate. By nightfall, she had tucked seventy knots under her keel, and her raffee topsail, three-cornered birthmark of the lakes, bulged with a bellyful of wind.

The northern stars came out and blinked at what they saw, and heard. A wolfhound, named after an Irish king, crouched beside a crib and thumped the deck with a tail for driving spikes. A scalp-locked Ottawa, cheated from a Dacotah warband by McCargo's sharpshooting Lancaster, jingled a silver amulet in the baby's ear. A Georgia Negro toted to freedom on the Underground Railroad because McCargo liked his voice, fanned a forefinger across his thick lower lip in a noise supposed to amuse infants.

The skipper steadied the helm. "Now, once more, lads, and try to make it sound like a lullabye. So-o-o-oftly!"

Black Pompey's tenor led the song: "I was a bachelor, I lived by myself, and sailing the lakes was my trade . . ."

The Scotch-Irish baritone joined in: "And the only, only thing I did that was wrong, was wooing a pretty maid."

Red Massasauga added his bass to the harmony: "I wooed her in the summertime, and in the winter, too; and the only, only thing I did that was wrong, was to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew!"

When the three of them hit those final bars, the Indian's bass began bouncing up from the bottom of Lake Huron.

"All right, second verse, and put him to sleep this time—so-o-o-oftly!"

"Now I am a bachelor and live with my son, and sailing the lakes is our trade; and every single time I look in his eyes, he reminds me of the fair young maid. He reminds me of the wintertime and of the summer, too; and the many, many times that I held her in my arms, just to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew!"

"Shhhh!" whispered McCargo. "I think he's . . ."

"Wahhhhhh!" cried the baby.

"It's this measly, three-part harmony that's bothering the soul of him," shrugged McCargo. "Sure, and he misses the fourth voice as much as I do."

"If you'll tote him to the cabin, Cap'n," drawled Black Pompey, "I'll ready up a good ole southern remedy for pickaninnies."

Red Massasauga took over the helm. McCargo barely had time to light the yellow sea-lantern in his cabin before the Negro tapped the door. He had a grin like Mr. Bones in the Minstrel Show, and a snowy handkerchief in his hand—twisted up and knotted so it formed a crude nipple at the end. "Sugar-tit," he explained, and the baby's eager mouth closed around it.

At three bells of the dawn watch, McCargo staggered from his bunk in answer to his son's wails. His right hand groped for the wet sugar-tit beside the crib. His other hand groped for the child—and touched wetter cloth.

"Lord, Lord," he groaned, "what a woman goes through!" Never had he changed a baby's breeches, but, by the dim light from the eastern sky, he fumbled in his sea-chest and pulled out Keweenaw Nips, squares of flannel that miners folded diaper-fashion, wrapping the ends around their bare feet.

McCargo rolled out on deck, the crib held at arm's length, the baby in the crook of his elbow and clouted with a

Copper Harbor sock. Red Massasauga eyed the crib. "Ugh! Chee-cah-go!" He hurled it overboard.

"By the sacred fire of Kildare! And do you think cribs grow in bullrushes along Lake Huron?"

The Indian stalked below, and returned with a buffalo-robe bag. He drew out a one-point, American Fur Company trade-blanket, and wrapped it around McCargo's son while the father breathed Celtic oaths. From the bag, he pulled a weird contraption. "Tickenagun," grunted Red Massasauga. "Indian cradle."

A bowie knife had carved the back-board, the footrest, and the headpiece from pliant linden wood. Tied together with deer sinews and hooped for protection, it was lined with moss.

McCargo stopped swearing. Long hours and loving care had carved this work of aboriginal art. He made no protest when the Indian tucked the baby inside, nor when Red Massasauga drew an elaborate length of broadcloth from the bag and wound it around the whole structure as if he were encasing a mummy.

Swathed and swaddled, bowed and bound, hooped and laced, only the baby's eyes showed from the cocoon of beaded embroidery and patterned quills. On the arch above his head, the Indian hung the rattlesnake tail, and it whirred as the *Minong* breasted the waves.

"My grandfather Pontiac and cousin Tecumseh look like that once," grunted Red Massasauga. "Before the lance and the war-club must come the tickenagun." He fastened a harness around McCargo's shoulders. "Now, Little Chief ride the back of his father and see the world, safe as flea on porcupine."

CHAPTER II

THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS

AT FOUR bells of the afternoon watch, the *Minong* danced into the crescent-moon bay of Mackinac Harbor. She held a corpse in her hold, her ratlins fluttered with damp Keweenaw Nis, and the mermaid on her bow had an eye out for a wet-nurse.

The Great Turtle of Michilimackinac, lifting his armored shell high above Huron's spray, had sighted white men before the *Mayflower* anchored off Plymouth Rock. From Skull Cave to Devil's Kitchen, the ghosts of Marquette and La Salle haunted his Gothic towers. Above his gleaming battlements and cedar palisades, the Fleur-de-lis of France, the Union Jack, and the Stars and Stripes had flown in turn. For the Great Turtle had been the key to a continent, the shrine of Manitou, the capital of the fur-trade, the meeting place of the four winds, the five sweet-water oceans, and the seven seas.

But to a McCargo even Mackinac must play second fiddle among islands, for Isle Royale had first call on his heart. As he nosed the *Minong* to the wharf, a casual sweep of the eye took in the scene: blue water alive with flashing red paddles and mackinaw sails; canoes drawn up on the pebbled beach; wigwams tilted along the shore; fish-nets creaking in the wind; whitewashed houses and fur-trade buildings staggering up the terraced cliffs; and, brooding over everything, the grotesque rocks, the glens, and guns of the fort.

Tugging her moorings at a neighboring wharf, McCargo spotted the lopsided smokestack and cake-frosting sidewheels of the *Prairie Dew*. That meant the alligator-hided Down-easterner was in port. He didn't know whether to throw up his beaver and cheer or trample it under his Wellington boots. The old-timer and he were the best of friends, but, with his relish for high-jinks, Sparhawk had a habit of getting his best friends into the worst scrapes.

"Make no mistake in unloading the Jamaica, lads, and stand guard, Cormac!" McCargo vaulted to the deck and threaded his way through the crowd. He passed a *coureur du bois* whose hairy arm clasped the yielding waist of a laughing Creole, a blanket-coated Wyandotte talking sign-language to a Montreal aristocrat in an orchid cutaway, a fur-capped Ohio raftsman spouting politics with a monocled British lord.

There were all shades and varieties of women—from Natchez belles to Monterey madonnas, from gay quadroons to gray Quakers, from Viennese toasts to Bowery tarts, from Bahama Blacks balancing laundry baskets on their heads to coppery Ojibways wearing circular plates of silver over their breasts.

Like a bidder at an auction of dairy cattle, McCargo cocked speculative brows at the pageant of camisoles and bodices. No amorous gleam disturbed his gray-blue eyes as he window-shopped for mother's milk, with his son strapped to an Indian cradleboard jouncing against his shoulder-blades.

A cyclone of sound up ahead ushered the strains of *"Roulant Ma Boule!"* McCargo's sensitive ears cringed at the whiskey baritone. The crowd parted into an avenue of awed faces as word flew up the line that the king of the pea-soupers had just beached his bateau and was spoiling for a brawl.

A walking bear of a man, he stormed closer, the ends of his scarlet sash streaming from his waist, and the crow feather that jutted from the knot in the voyageur's kerchief on his head proclaimed him the bully-boy of his brigade. "Baptiste Lafromboise, *c'est moi,"* he bellowed, "from Green Bay and Fond du Lac! Clear ze road, ma frans, clear ze road for Baptiste Lafromboise!"

With a baby on his back, the master of the *Minong* had every excuse to step aside. But that's what decided him against it. No McCargo ever gave ground, and it wouldn't do to spoil the tradition while his own son watched.

Baptiste snorted in amazement at the smiling devil who dared block his passage. Then he charged, and the crowd went wild.

In warm-up bouts with Tom Sayes, champion of England, McCargo, under the approving eye of the Prince of Wales, had learned to handle his maulies with the Pick of the Fancy, but, hampered by the shoulder straps and the swaying cradle, he now chose an attack picked up in Parisian slums.

As Baptiste lunged, he feinted with his hands and drove his left Wellington into the crimson-sashed waist. The French-Canadian doubled up with a "Whoosh!" McCargo danced back. He shifted his weight and high-kicked Baptiste's chin with the toe of his other boot.

It sounded as if someone had uncorked a bottle of champagne. Lafromboise from Fond du Lac took one tottering step forward, mumbled "By Gar!" and shook the earth like a felled hemlock.

McCargo plucked the crow feather from his kerchief and placed it in a swaddling fold of the cradle while his son gurgled.

"YOU sure gave him the sabot, son!" Sparhawk bobbed up from nowhere with the Duchess in tow. "Me and the Madame was gabbing with Black Pompey down to the wharf when we heard the uproar, so we headed for the middle of the excitement, and, per usual, here you are!"

He tilted back his plug hat, reached in the pocket of his Prince Albert, and bit off a corner of Peerless Plug. "Seems like you got your troubles!" *Sp-urt!* "But this ain't no way to round up a wet-nurse!" *Sp-lash!*

The Duchess was shaped like a bottle, but her contents were cordial. She had the baby off McCargo's back and cuddled against her mountainous bosom before he could ask, "How's business?"

"Could be better." The pink ostrich plumes in her hat dipped over the cradle. "Me and the girls are getting along, but there ought to be a law against the amachoor competition."

Sparhawk scratched a chin that looked like stubble land at harvest time. "How you aimin' on gettin' a wet-nurse, son? Advertise in the noospapers? Knock on doors? Paste up hand-bills? Or grab a likely shemale out of the crowd?"

"Well . . ." began McCargo.

"Don't bother to put on your thinking-cap, son." *Sp-urt!* "Me and the Madame got your problem all solved." *Sp-lash!*

The pink ostrich plumes nodded. "There's a girl up at my house, and her labor pains are only fifteen minutes apart and—"

McCargo bowed. "Not meaning any disrespect to your house or your girls, Duchess, but I couldn't think of—"

"Ain't one of her regular girls!" *Sp-urt!* "They know how to take care of themselves!" *Sp-lash!*

"She's straight." The Duchess sketched a brief biography. "Name of Hulda Roen Slogvig. A Norsky. Came over from Trondheim last year with her husband. He died of Asiatic cholera in Cleveland early this spring. She signed aboard his ship as cook, but they kicked her off here a couple of weeks ago accounta her condition. I took her in and I'm paying her bills, but the money she'd make from you

would buck up her self-respect. She's *that* kind."

"Sure, and the idea *sounds* good," hesitated McCargo with a dubious glance at Sparhawk, "but will she be able to breast-feed her own baby and mine?"

"Will she? You ain't seen her!" *Sp-urt!* "Hulda could nurse an army without changing sides!" *Sp-lash!*

Cormac loped up, barked once, pointed his nose toward the *Minong*. McCargo slipped a sheaf of greenbacks into the bejeweled hand of the Duchess. He fondled the cradle and said, "Guard, Cormac, guard!"

Sparhawk spat out his chew. "Git along to Isle Royale and don't worry about a thing. One of my boilers busted on the trip up and I'll be around town for three weeks—until after the Fourth of July at least. Just leave everything to me. . . . Come along, Duchess! We've got to give birth to a baby!"

They strolled away, Cormac—true to his trust—at their heels. McCargo hurried back to the *Minong*, for he knew from the way the wolfhound had acted that he was needed at the schooner.

Thirteen hogsheads of prime Jamaica lined the wharf. A belligerent mob of shanty-Irish fishermen were working up courage to rush the ship.

Red Massasauga brandished a tomahawk in one hand and a belaying pin in the other. Black Pompey stood by to repel boarders with a razor-blade that gleamed as wickedly as a Cossack's saber.

McCargo elbowed through and tapped the ringleader on the chest. "What's the ruckus, O'Neill?"

Shamus O'Neill, keeper of the King William Tavern, had a figure to fit his station in life—like a barrel, tapering somewhat at both ends, with a bung-starter for a nose. With McCargo on the scene, he abruptly switched his tactics. "Take it easy, boys . . . No ruckus a-tall, Cap'n. Just a misunderstanding. I ordered fourteen hogsheads of Jamaica for my Independence Day shindig. All I want is the last hogshead. Thirteen's an unlucky number."

"Fourteen would be unluckier." McCargo stropped his voice. "The last hogshead isn't for sale at any price, and pocket that pistol before it grows up to be a gun and hurts somebody, mostly you!"

The mob growled, but O'Neill shoved the pistol into his belt. He turned to his gang: "O.K., boys, roll the rum up the hill, and mind you ease the casks into the cellar!" He bossed the job until the thirteenth hogshead rumbled off the wharf, then made his way back to McCargo.

"Shovin' off, huh?" He bared his teeth in a snuff-colored grin. "Well, just to show there's no hard feelin's, how about you and your crew havin' a stirrup-cup of Bristol Cream with me at the King William?"

McCargo wavered. He *had* broken a contract with O'Neill, and his mouth watered for the queen of sherries. "Let's go," he said, and the four of them toiled up the hill.

AS O'NEILL entered the tavern, his brogan lashed out at a blob of fur on the floor, and a miaouling Maltese thudded against the far wall. "Damn all cats," he snarled, "and bolt the doors, boys, they've walked smack into our parlor!"

Iron clanked in sockets, O'Neill skipped behind the protection of the bar, and by the dirty light that stole through a solitary window a glowering line of shanty-Irish fishermen armed with applewood shillelaghs rushed their attack.

"By the dread Idol of Cromm Cruach," cried McCargo, "come to the wake!" He splintered a table-top against the ugly faces. A rifled chair shaved O'Neill's ducking head and shattered the bar-mirror. He heard Red Massasauga's Ottawa war-cry and the Congo chant of Black Pompey. The air whistled with furniture, brandy casks, and beer kegs. His rocking-socking fists punched holes through fish-rank clothing and salvoed on flesh. The sickly-sweet smell of blood widened his nostrils.

But it was three men against upwards of thirty. Like bull-elks dragged down by a wolf-pack, the Indian and the Negro sank to the sawdust. A shillelagh exploded on McCargo's head.

He recovered consciousness, bound to a chair, with a bar rag stuffed in his mouth. He fought to focus his eyes, and the bump on his head felt like the Galtees of Tipperary. Trussed up like dressed turkeys, Red Massasauga and Black Pompey littered the floor beside him.

Knuckles bruised the bolted door, and

thunder rolled from outside. *"Ouvre la porte! C'est moi,* Baptiste Laframboise from Green Bay and Fond du Lac!"

O'Neill perched in the middle of the room, his brogans drumming the sides of the X-marked fourteenth hogshead. "Hit the next tavern, Frenchy!" he bawled. "This place is closed for repairs!"

A shadow flicked across the murky window. Footsteps faded on gravel.

Hopelessly, McCargo weighed the chances. Cormac guarded the baby. Sparhawk assisted the Duchess as midwife for a Norsky. Stout fish-net cording bit into his wrists and ankles.

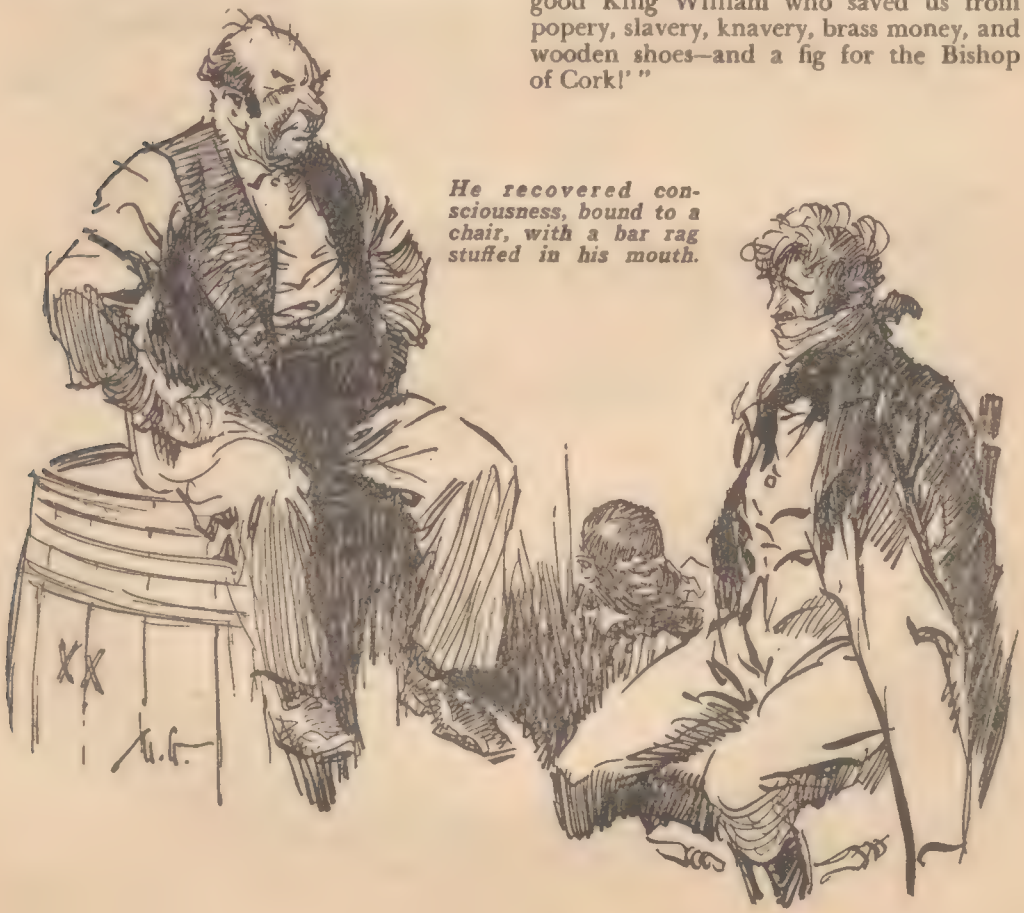
"I been pining for an excuse to even the score," rasped O'Neill. "When you hounded Uriah Ginch out of Detroit for peddling rotgut to redskins, I lost my best silent partner. We got a full program of entertainment lined up for ya, but we'll start out by testing this rum of yours that was too good to sell to the likes of us—test it in the old toast that's too good for the likes of you!"

He hopped off the hogshead and began to worry the bung-starter. "Bring up your glasses, boys, and fill 'em to the Prince of Orange!"

The Heidelberg dueling scar flamed on McCargo's cheek. Between the Orangemen of Ulster and the Green-men of Munster there must ever be war! Sure, and it was Clare, Cork, Kerry and Limerick against Antrim, Donegal, Londonderry, and Tyrone! The Loch Lomond Scotch of his mother submerged under the boiling blood of a father who had hailed from Knockadoon Head in the County of Cork.

O'Neill watched his writhing face, and prolonged the agony. The cat crept forward. He tumbled it again with his toe, and nagged the bung-starter.

"Maybe you don't remember how the toast goes? 'Here's to the glorious, pious, and immortal memory of the great and good King William who saved us from popery, slavery, knavery, brass money, and wooden shoes—and a fig for the Bishop of Cork!' "



He recovered consciousness, bound to a chair, with a bar rag stuffed in his mouth.

He gloated over the look in McCargo's eyes, and started to pry loose the bung. "Step up, boys!"

The windowpane shattered inward. A blunderbuss with a mouth to match cannons poked through the jagged hole. "She's loaded to the gills!" *Sp-urt!* "With rusty nails and broken glass!" *Sp-lash!*

A battering ram hit the bolted door and careened into the room. "By Gar!" roared Baptiste Lafromboise from Fond du Lac, and his fist blotted out O'Neill's face.

Sparhawk crawled through the window and herded the cowed fishermen against a wall. "Didja ever see the beat of it?" he asked as the French-Canadian tenderly cut loose McCargo, uttering sympathetic clucks. "Since you knocked the daylights outa him, that overstuffed lunk's been follering you like a pet poodle. He's the one tipped me off. Lookit 'im! Belongs in that rhyme about a spaniel, a woman, and a walnut tree—more ya beat 'em the better they be!"

Chafing his wrists and stamping circulation back into his feet, McCargo took charge. With the five-hundred-pound hogshead balanced on their shoulders, Red Massasauga and Black Pompey marched back to the *Minong*. Baptiste lashed O'Neill's wrists and staked him, belly down, against the bar, with his brogans touching the rail.

McCargo stroked the Maltese until it purred. Then he brought it close to O'Neill, and its spine arched, its eyes glared, and it spat hate.

"O'Neill," said McCargo, "many a man on the lakes has felt the sting of a cat-o'-nine-tails. But you'll be the first to be flayed with a living cat!"

He ripped off the Ulster Irishman's shirt and the pink flesh crawled with goose-pimples. The fishermen huddled closer to the wall as their ringleader begged for mercy.

"I'm only sorry for the cat, but he'll be taking revenge for the kickings you gave him!" McCargo lifted the Maltese by the tail, and, like a whip, brought it down across the tavern keeper.

THE cat landed on its feet, miaouling and spitting, and its claws dug furrows from the nape of O'Neill's neck to the small of his back.

Ten times, McCargo lashed out with his living whip—until there were no more screams in O'Neill. Then he freed the Maltese and it flashed out the door before he could wipe the sweat from his forehead.

Eyes dark as chips of volcanic glass swept the fishermen. "Let it be a lesson!" And he strode toward the wharf.

"Sacre bleu!" murmured Baptiste Lafromboise, matching his strides.

"There's times, son, when I figger you're too soft for this neck of the woods!" *Sp-urt!* "You should of killed 'im!" *Sp-lash!*

McCargo boarded the *Minong*. There were things to say to Baptiste Lafromboise and he said them until the burly voyageur blushed like a Quebec schoolgirl. There was a question to ask Sparhawk: "Everything all right up at the house?"

The old-timer's mind seemed on other things. "Hmmmm? Oh, that? Sure, sure! Hulda came through the delivery swell. Be nursing the baby in no time."

"I'm counting on you," said McCargo.

"So did Commodore Perry and Andy Jackson!" *Sp-urt!* "Don't worry, son, I'll fix everything!" *Sp-lash!*

The *Minong* sped the ninety-odd miles to the Soo in less than six hours, but it took McCargo and his crew over a week to haul her down Portage Avenue on rollers and slide her into the water above the Saint Marys Rapids.

Out Whitefish Bay they sailed, and, although the breeze lacked bounce, the *Minong* skimmed the cold sparkle of Lake Superior as if she were towed by a brace of trained sturgeon. McCargo steered the international boundary line, the Picture Rocks on his port bow and Otter Head to starboard. Off Marquette, he banged a cannon salute at an iron carrier bound up from the Negaunee Range, and, rounding Keweenaw Point, the *Minong* laughed on the last lap of her voyage home, for she owed her name to the Indian word for Isle Royale—"the good place to get copper."

At McCargo Cove, the three men climbed the knoll where a cabin had weathered three decades before Bunker Hill became a battle. They sank to their knees beside the graves where treasured keepsakes of McCargo's mother and father were buried—the parents who had sailed away on Lake Michigan, never to be heard

from again except for a gargoyled taffrail washed up on Grand Traverse Bay.

Then, McCargo lowered himself twenty feet down a crude, neighboring mine-shaft, already an old scar in the earth when the Pharaohs built their pyramids. He pried loose a slab of dull, red ore and by the time the Indian and the Negro had dug a grave three times ordinary width, he had carved a copper headstone: *IN MEMORIAM — PRUDENCE MEADE McCARGO.*

Red Massasauga and Black Pompey staggered up from the beach. They tied ropes around a makeshift coffin and gentled it into the grave. With bared head, McCargo recited by heart the Sailor's Psalm over the fourteenth hogshead from Jamaica.

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths. Their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Amen."

His voice broke on the last words and his eyes brimmed, and he wondered whether the Lord would think it right that a man must bury his wife in a casket of rum.

Black Pompey's glistening back bent over a shovel and the dark-sweet warmth of fresh-turned earth thudded on the stout ribs of the hogshead while Red Massasauga, mindful of missionary days at St. Ignace, tuned his voice to the praying needles of the pines and the measured litany of the beach, and sang *Rock of Ages.*

"May her soul be taken to the land of promise in Tir Tairngiri," said McCargo, "and her blithe spirit dance the flowered meadows of Meg Mell!" Then, in a baritone grown husky, he led them in the song dearest to Prudence.

"A man whose name was Johnny Sands had married Betty Hague. And though she brought him gold and lands, she proved a terrible plague. For oh! she was a scolding wife, full of caprice and whim. He said that he was tired of life, and she was tired of him. And she was tired of him!"

Red Massasauga's bass vibrated on the repeated line and Black Pompey took up the story, telling how Johnny Sands tied his hands so that he would be helpless and then asked Betty to push him into the river.

"Now, stand up, she says, upon the brink, and I'll prepare the run. And I'll prepare the run!"

They rounded out the tale like three Irishmen at a wake: "All down the hill his loving bride now ran with all her force— To push him in— He stepped aside, and she fell in, of course. Now splashing, dashing like a fish— Oh, save me, Johnny Sands!—I can't my dear, though much I wish, for you have tied my hands. For you have tied my hands!"

Isle Royale trembled to its depths with the echoing bass of the Ottawa. McCargo shook his head and frowned. "A trio can't do much," he said. "We could have given her a rousing send-off with a quartet!"

CHAPTER III

SAINTS AND SINNERS

THE *Minong* shook out her sails and kept a bone in her teeth straight across Superior and through the bottleneck of Point Iroquois and Gros Cap. She seemed impatient to get back to Mackinac.

At the head of the Rapids above the Soo, McCargo nudged her to the wharf, and he knew why his dreams had been troubled by demons. Sparhawk and the Duchess were waiting on the shore.

The ruffles on the old-timer's shirt front showed brown stains, sign that he'd been spitting to windward, a habit of his when things went wrong. "Son," he said, "you just come in the nick! I got the fastest boat on the lakes waiting for us at the other end of the Rapids. Let's git going!"

McCargo grabbed him by the shoulders of the Prince Albert. His heart choked the words in his throat, but he strangled out questions.

"I'll explain later, son. Right now, every second counts! Come on!"

"I can't leave the *Minong*. She'll kick up her heels at anything in sails!"

"You ain't got time to roll her over the portage! It's the second day of the month and all Hell breaks loose come July Fourth!"

"I'll be shooting the Rapids," said McCargo, and barked orders to his crew, while a crowd of dockside idlers spread the fantastic news.

The Soo boasted a floating population of about three hundred voyageurs, miners, traders, and Indians. Ordinarily, they whiled away the day knocking down tenpins, clicking billiard balls, or tilting back in dramshop chairs with cheroots in their mouths. Only the bartenders were busy.

Now, the whole town turned out, spilling from doorways and tearing to the dock. They waited to see the *Minong* commit suicide. Nobody expected her to do the impossible, for the odds were a thousand to one, with no takers.

"I'll pick you up at the end of the portage," yelled McCargo.

"Learn your grandma ta suck eggs!" *Sp-urt!* "I ain't hankering to live forever!" *Sp-lash!*

The Duchess followed Sparhawk aboard. "Might as well traipse along," she said. "I'd die of fright just watching this from shore!"

McCargo shoved off, and the *Minong* began to bob in the current. The crowd went: "Ahhhhhh!"

At the Soo, the greatest body of fresh water in the world hurls itself from Lake Superior toward Lake Huron through a narrow outlet studded with granite boulders. Skilled paddles could direct a small boat down the Rapids, but, even so, many a ride ended with Death at the rudder. Since the beginning of time, only a foolhardy few among big ships had risked the passage, and some of them still could be seen, their dead masts jutting, their ribs bleaching on the rocks.

McCargo braced himself at the helm. The *Minong* quivered in the first rush of wild water. Ahead of her stretched the falls, tearing down a twenty-foot grade for three-quarters of a mile, like a stampede of white horses shaking their manes in a canyon.

The Duchess screamed as McCargo shifted the helm and the *Minong* heeled over. The black frown of granite vanished in leaping foam. After that the tumult of the waters drowned all other sounds.

Like a tiger, the river pounced; like a woman scorned—passionate and hungry to hurt.

Another rock bared shark's teeth. Again the *Minong* heeled. She lost a coat of paint. McCargo righted the helm. Spray dashed over the raffee topsail.

A whirling dervish danced down the devil's falls and onto the broad bosom of the Saint Marys, deep and wide enough to float a squadron of seventy-fours, rapid and clear as a Wisconsin trout-stream.

McCargo had to pry loose his hands from the helm when he turned it over to Black Pompey. He walked stiff-legged to the after-deck.

The Duchess had her rouge-pot out, and she needed the color. Sparhawk looked as if he had swallowed his chaw, and he had. "Dang it," he grumbled, "about time Henry Clay and them other pussy-footin' Congressmen woke up and found we need a canal around that teakettle. For two pine-tree shillings, I'd git out right now and dig the ditch myself!"

"Don't stall," snapped McCargo. "Give me the bad news. My son isn't—" his face whitened—"dead?"

"Nope." Sparhawk's jaw clamped down on a fresh bite of Peerless Plug. "But there's a leetle argyment about him being your son!"

"What?"

"Don't fly off the handle. You see, the trouble started when Hulda's baby was still-born."

The Duchess nodded her ostrich plumes. "When she asked to see her baby, I gave her a song and dance, and then Sparhawk walked in with your baby."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Yeah. She got the idea it was hern. And after me and the Madame saw the way she loved up to it, we didn't have the heart to tell her different."

"You should watch her nurse it!" The ostrich plume waved. "Like one of them genteel poems in Godey's Lady's Book!"

McCargo paced the deck, his eyes cursing both of them.

"Reason we got worried and busted up here to grab you," said Sparhawk, "is because Hulda's leaving day after tomorrow. Been promised a galley job aboard the *Western World* on the Buffalo, Detroit

and Chicago run. And she's fixin' on takin' her baby along!"

"By the Seven Unholy Druids," roared McCargo, "it's *my* baby!"

"Sure it is, son!" *Sp-urt!* "But she calls him Olaf!" *Sp-lash!*

WITH her master closeted in his cabin, the *Minong* sped toward the Great Turtle of Michilimackinac. She flirted her taffrail at Sugar Island, curtsied to St. Joseph, tickled Drummond, and darted through Detour Passage.

But when she hit the whitecaps of Lake Huron, McCargo still wrestled with his problem. Fate had dealt him a stacked deck, and the joker was wild.

He could flay a man with a live cat, but could he tell a young widow that the baby she loved as her own belonged to him?

The question was that simple, and that complicated!

When the *Minong* tossed her saucy bonnets at Bois Blanc, he still wracked his brain for an answer. He could get back his son, but could he live with himself if he did it at the expense of a mother's double-broken heart—once at the death of her baby, and again at the death of her hopes?

There must be a solution, but when the *Minong* warped alongside the dock at Mackinac, that solution remained as far away as ever. "Let's go on up to the Madame's," said Sparhawk. "Getting a look at the girl might help you make up your mind."

It might have helped. The door of Hulda's room stood ajar. Her bureau drawers hung open, and empty.

"She can't have got far!" *Sp-urt!* "I told Frenchy to keep an eye on her!" *Sp-lash!*

"Watch where you're spitting," raged the Duchess. "This is a genteel establishment!"

The demure young ladies in the parlor, crocheting and knitting until their quota of evening visitors arrived, knew nothing about Hulda's departure. "We sleep so late," apologized one of them, yawning prettily at McCargo.

"Let's find Frenchy!" Sparhawk led the way.

Just as the sun slipped off the edge of the world, they found Baptiste Lafromboise from Green Bay and Fond du Lac. Sprawled on his belly with a knife buried in his back. His dying hand had traced on the pebbled beach what looked to be six letters: *C-A-S-T-O-R.*

To the sailors, the charted sky held a Castor, the twin star of Pollux in the constellation Gemini. Castor also recalled an old sea term for the St. Elmo's fire that blazed on the main yardarm during a storm, foretelling the end of the blow.

But what would a French-Canadian voyageur have to do with either of these as the rattle rose to his throat and his lungs whistled for air?

"I'll see that he gets a funeral with a black ostrich plume to wear in his kerchief," vowed McCargo. "A crow feather doesn't fit him!"

"O'Neill's our man," rasped Sparhawk.

But the King William Tavern loomed dark and deserted. Across the door a crude handbill invited all fishermen: "Come to the Independence Day Party at Whiskey Point. Bring your choice of weapons. Rum—all you can hold. Women—all you can hug. And a good time will be had by all, except the Saints!"

"Another of O'Neill's fancy programs," growled McCargo, "and if he's kidnapped my baby . . ."

A dozen reliable witnesses swore that O'Neill's sloop had pulled out of Mackinac Harbor late that afternoon. No Norsky girl had gone aboard, no Irish wolfhound, no child.

ALL through the night, pine torches flickered like fireflies on the cliffs and along the shores of the Great Turtle. Not until late afternoon of the following day did the searching party give up hope and trickle back to town.

"She ain't on the island!" *Sp-urt!* "And a boat don't leave no more trace in the water than a bird in the air!" *Sp-lash!*

Up the street roistered a mob of shanty-Irish fishermen, three sheets to the wind. Their mouths dirtied the air with foul oaths and jests. As they paraded along, they hammered pots and skillets with the handles of their bowie knives.

"Sounds like the boilers of the *Prairie Dew!*" *Sp-urt!* "And they're gettin' up steam for mischief!" *Sp-lash!*

Decent citizens huddled in their houses

as the full-throated hoodlums roared past on their way to the mackinaw boats on the beach. "Come along to the Independence Day Party! . . . Jimmy Strang's settin' up for a king! . . . We'll crown him with cuspidors! . . . And wait'll we get our hands on his harem!"

"This isn't any part of our fight," McCargo hesitated, "but . . ."

"But O'Neill's on the other side!" And Sparhawk's rolling gait set a course for the wharf.

The *Minong* shook her stern at Lake Huron, ran the Straits, slipped out into Lake Michigan, and whispered across Paradise Bay to a docking at the City of St. James, with the North Star hung like a Christmas ornament on her jib-boom.

A patrol of Destroying Angels, armed to the teeth, marched McCargo and his army of three around the sandy slopes of Mount Pisgah and into the headquarters of James Jesse Strang in the rear of the Mormon Tabernacle. The leader of the Saints rose from behind his littered desk—short as Napoleon but with a shadow that stretched across the entire North Country. Dark eyes, set in a hatchet face above a flaming beard, probed them.

"Welcome to Big Beaver Island, gentlemen." His voice had the organ-range of an evangelist, from murmur to boom. "So you've come to offer your services in the Fourth of July battle."

"It ain't that we're *for you!" Sp-urt!* "But we're agin O'Neill!" *Sp-lash!*

"I must remind you, Captain, that the use of intoxicants, tea, *and* tobacco, is forbidden in our community."

"Great Day!" Sparhawk took out his chaw. "Well, I suppose the extra allotment of wives helps make up for it!"

The magnetic eyes of the prophet flashed heat lightning. "The difference between polygamy and adultery is the difference between Heaven and Hell!"

McCargo studied the man—and told him about Hulda and the baby. "We figured maybe O'Neill had kidnapped them and brought them to Whiskey Point."

Strang turned his eyes toward the glimmer of lights across Paradise Bay. Faintly on the wind came the sound of drunken carousal. "No. My patrols bring me hourly reports. No woman is down there, and no child."

"I mean no slight to your scouts, but I'll be after taking a look for myself." McCargo ordered Red Massasauga and Black Pompey to return to the ship, and gave them a job of work to do.

Strang nodded approvingly. "That might turn the trick on the rascals."

Sparhawk and the master of the *Minong* skirted the shores of Paradise Bay and started out on Whiskey Point. "They say," muttered the old-timer, "that Strang has a wife for every day in the week except one." His chuckle sounded like a cricket with a cold. "On the Sabbath, he rests!"

"Keep a quiet tongue in your teeth!"

"Don't worry, son. They won't have any guards posted—no more than the Hessians had at Trenton!"

Snatches of giddy song and bawdy conversation became strong in their ears. They crept closer and crouched by the rim of the pool of light thrown by the oil lamps of the whiskey trading-post. The breeze reeked with rum.

McCargo's heart sank. Strang's patrols were right. None but man held revelry here. If the drunken louts could be called men.

O'Neill had the floor, swaying, lifting a mug. "Now, remember, boys, at morning services, we enter the Tabernacle meek as sucking doves and bow our heads in solemn prayer."

The fishermen roared. What a grand sense of humor had O'Neill!

"Then we kill the Mormon leaders, rape the women, burn the houses, brain all redheaded brats, and the fishing banks of the Beavers belong to us, with no sawed-off royal highness to keep us from selling good rotgut to bad redskins!"

The fishermen wah-hooed. This was meat to their liking!

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF PARADISE BAY

WHEN dawn rolled a bloodshot eye over the horizon, the waters off Whiskey Point bristled with masts. From the four corners of the lakes, fishermen had come to sample O'Neill's rum and celebrate the Fourth. They hailed from Mackinac and Seuil Choix, from Gull Island and Pine River, from Torch Lake and Grand Traverse Bay. And they were loaded for bear!

On the heights of Mount Pisgah, James Jesse Strang, a dwarfed giant, shook his fist and hurled at them a curse that still echoes in every storm that shakes the freshwater seas.

"May the bones rot in the living tomb of their flesh . . . May their blood swarm with a leprous life, generating chilling agues and burning fevers . . . May peace and home be names forgotten to them, and the beauty they have betrayed to infamy . . . May it be to their eyes a crawling mass of putridity and battening corruption, its delicate hues a sickly light, its auburn tresses the posthumous growth of temples of crawling worms, its fragrant breath the blast of perdition . . . With desires insatiate may each gratification turn to burning bitterness and shame!"

The prophet spoke, and trembled, and raised his arms toward heaven. Then he gave way to the man of war. "Your turn, Captain McCargo!"

General "Mad Anthony" Wayne once had fired the fieldpiece that Red Massasauga and Black Pompey had hauled up Mount Pisgah during the night from its mountings on the foredeck of the *Minong*. Captain Sparhawk rammed home a red-hot cannonball down its maw. McCargo touched off a match.

BRROOoommmmmm! Black smoke bellied out. The screaming shot missed the whiskey trading-post by less than two rods. Fishermen tumbled from the doors and windows, taking to the bush.

Another ball rammed home. McCargo sighted. *BRROOoommmmmm!* The second shot skipped across the blue lagoon of Paradise Bay, bounced over a mackinaw boat, and plowed a furrow of foam in the water.

A fisherman wildly waving a white flag on a stick stumbled around the bay and up the sand dune. Bleary-eyed and shaking, he asked for an explanation.

"Tell your friends," said McCargo, "that we are firing a salute in honor of the Fourth of July."

"But we hope," added Sparhawk, "to improve our aim!"

The messenger turned to go. McCargo stopped him. "Is O'Neill on his sloop?"

"Yes, sir," and he was gone, his heels skidding on the yellow sand.

"Put in an extra hot ball!" McCargo bent over the sighting.

"Aye, aye!" Sparhawk rammed. "And it's got his initials on it!"

Touched match. Black smoke. *BRR-QOoommmm!* Cannon recoil. The shot hissed through the air. Bee-lined for the sloop. *Wham!* The deck cabin exploded into kindling wood. A fat sack of clothes seemed to hover lazily above the water until it plunged down, grotesque and stiff. Bubbles flecked the glassy surface of Paradise Bay.

Lost without their leader, the fishermen milled about on the beach and then made a dash for their boats. McCargo spurred them on with a pepperpot cannonade. Within less than fifteen minutes, the invasion fleet sailed away, like gulls before an approaching storm.

Strang held out his hand. "McCargo, I not only am convinced you're the greatest gunner on the lakes, but I believe your story about the baby. I'd appreciate the honor of having you and your friends attend my coronation."

So that's how McCargo and Sparhawk happened to be present when the only king ever crowned in the United States ascended the throne of an island empire. Along with the black beards and coal-skuttle sunbonnets, they crowded into the roofless Tabernacle of the Saints, and stood up front near the speaker's platform where a large chair waited for the prophet, with six smaller ones on either side for the Twelve Apostles. A Mormon pursed his lips to a trumpet. Through the door of the Tabernacle came James Jesse Strang, a long red robe trailing to the ground, his Twelve Apostles in tow. They took their places on the platform.

Prime Minister George Adams advanced, a one-time theatrical trouper, wearing a moth-eaten costume of King Richard III. A tin sword flapped against his hip, and he carried a crown in his hand.

Again the trumpet blew. Strang straightened to his full stature of three inches over five feet. With dramatic gestures and flourishes, Prime Minister Adams placed a cheap circlet of metal, adorned with a cluster of glass stars, on his head.

The fat, blue jowls moved: "In the name of the Apostle Paul, I pledge thee King James the First of Beaver Island, *Roi de l'Isle du Castor!*"

"In the name of the Apostle Paul, I pledge thee King James the First of Beaver Island."

A BELL tinkled in McCargo's mind. But he had no time to think, for the congregation boomed: "Praise the Lord!" And from Strang's headquarters at the rear of the Tabernacle a Brunhilde of a woman stepped forward, her peasant dress outlining a figure that only the vast sweep of Michelangelo's pencil could have sketched. Flaxen-haired and square-browed, her blue eyes sparkled almost on a level with McCargo's.

From the platform, she led the singing: "Let me go to Big Beaver in Michigan Lake, let me have my dear friends and my relatives take, my wife and my children and brethern also, to keep God's commandments, O there let me go!"

She had a voice to shake the rafters of Heaven, or to charm a bird from a tree. Sparhawk nudged him. "Quiet!" he hushed. "That's real singing!"

"Hell's fire," rumbled Sparhawk, "that's Hulda!"

The meeting broke up. Off to the picnic grounds at Font Lake streamed the Saints and the Twelve Apostles, children at their heels.

Strang helped Hulda off the platform, his crown tipping like a cockeyed halo. McCargo lunged toward him, with hands that were grappling hooks.

Sparhawk grabbed his arm and yelled, "Don't be a fool! Give him a chance to explain."

Strang motioned McCargo and Hulda

into his office. The Norsky took McCargo's son from the Indian cradleboard dangling on a wall-peg, sat down, and crooned the baby to her breast.

The master of the *Minong* bunched his jaw muscles, but his eyes were tender on the child. Everything would be perfect, if it weren't for . . . "You've got two minutes," he grated.

"One is enough." Strang straightened his crown.

"O'Neill told Hulda that you were coming back from the Soo to kidnap her baby, and that Sparhawk and the Duchess were in on the plot. He advised her to escape to the Beavers, figuring revenge would be certain in the riot to come."

Strang fingered his auburn beard. "That's why he gave instructions to kill all children with red hair. The fishermen understood it to mean the wiping-out of my family. O'Neill had a fancier idea."

The Heidelberg dueling scar writhed on McCargo's cheek.

"Curiously enough, Hulda might have sought sanctuary here anyway. Her husband was converted to Mormonism in Europe. So, with the baby and the dog—and what a time we've had keeping that brute under cover—she slipped aboard a steamer that takes on wood at our docks, and has been living with my wives since that time."

Clapping a hand to his shaky crown, Strang walked to the door. "I kept Hulda hidden, but only because I couldn't be sure of you." His magnetic eyes probed. "Now, I'm fairly certain. The Lord moves in mysterious ways." He turned the doorknob. "Hulda is sorry she believed O'Neill's lies, and is anxious to make amends."

McCargo leaned over and whispered, "But this isn't getting us anywhere. Won't you tell her the truth about the baby once and for all?"

"I'm sorry," said the Monarch of Lake Michigan. "I'm only King Strang, not King Solomon," and closed the door behind him.

McCargo plumped in a chair and stared at the Norsky. Perhaps, in the long run, the kindest thing to do would be to blurt out the real facts. Why should he consider her feelings above his own? That was his son she held and, dammit, the girl meant nothing to him!

He'd say this much for her, she'd taken good care of the baby. Must have gained several pounds. Legs and arms so chubby they could hardly wriggle. And didn't look like a wrinkled winter apple any more.

Oh, hell! Why not get it over with? Why not stand up and say, "Hulda Slogvig, I'm sorry but you're just a hired wet-nurse! And if you think Sparhawk and the Duchess are in on the plot this time, I can take you to Beldorado and prove my baby was born before yours. Yes, and what's more I can positively identify him by the anchor-shaped birthmark on his left shoulder. Now, how are you going to answer that one, Hulda? And hand over my son!"

That's what he'd tell her! And he opened his mouth to start saying it then and there.

A broad smile curved her lips as the baby began to whimper. "Hay ess hongry," she murmured. "Hay ess alvays hongry!" She said it as if it were a matter of pride.

Unconscious of any loss of modesty, she slipped her shoulder out of the peasant dress, and brought the baby against her bared breast. The little tyke put out his hands blindly and buried his face in the rounded well-spring of life, sucking greedily at first, and then more leisurely, with contented gurgles.

And McCargo saw the rapt look on Hulda's face, the dreamy glory of her blue eyes, and he knew he couldn't do it. He could flay a man with a live cat, but he couldn't tell a young widow that the baby she loved as her own belonged to him.

But the *Western World,* bound down from Mackinac on her run to Chicago, would be pulling into Paradise Bay within a few hours to pick up cordwood for her engines. Could he let Hulda step aboard and take away his son?

The answer was no. The answer to everything was no!

SPARHAWK'S knuckles splintered the door. "Fixin' to set up housekeepin' in there? Git a wriggle on!"

McCargo went outside.

"You look like the last day of Judg-

(Continued on page 144)

HIGHWAY TO HELL

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

LOST somewhere in the parched deserts of Central Australia, if you believe the amazing story of Harry Lasseter, is $5,000,000,000 in gold. Repeat: five billion dollars in the world's most negotiable currency. That fortune, if it does exist, is all yours . . . for the finding.

Except that you'll probably die.

The milestones along the torturous, burning journey are the white skulls of gold-dazzled adventurers who believed in Harry Lasseter. Men have been seeking his fabulous golden highway for forty-seven years. Disaster and death on the fierce Australian sands have been their only reward. Yet men are still searching for it today.

All hard-rock evidence points to Lasseter's Reef as a gigantic hoax, the fevered invention of a madman or charlatan. Yet there is a wide margin of doubt. If Harry Lasseter was a fraud, few hoaxes in history ever reached the tremendous proportions that his did. Already over $2,000,000 has been spent on ill-fated expeditions, which have had the earnest cooperation of no less an authority than the Australian government itself.

THE STORY of Lasseter's Reef is undeniably strange, full of baffling contradictions. Some facts make the existence of Lasseter's Reef highly credible; other facts also prove that the short, stocky, blond prospector was a liar, an eccentric and a braggart.

A FACT STORY

By

JULES ARCHER

Australians themselves are not too sure that it was a hoax, although most refer to the Reef smilingly as "Lasseter's Folly." But even as you read this, Aussie bushmen are still "fossicking" in the deserts of Central Australia, gambling their lives on the word of Harry Lasseter.

The reef he claimed to find is a nature-

built highway of quartz, stretching for hot miles from nowhere to nowhere in the desert interior, and assaying three ounces of gold to the ton. If this $5,000,000,000 highway of gold definitely does not exist, Lasseter will go down in history as the ex-sailor who fired the imagination of an entire nation with the most fantastic story ever told.

What happened before the year 1930 is based largely upon the undocumented testimony of Lasseter himself. Way back about 1900, according to him, he had heard a rumor among sailors that the MacDonnell Ranges in Central Australia actually sparkled with huge rubies, so rich were the deposits.

He left his ship at a northern Queensland port. Buying horses, provisions and prospecting gear, the youthful sailor set out alone to brave the waterless, blazing deserts. The ordeal was harsh enough to test the sanity of any man. Month after month he churned up red dust beneath his horses' hooves as he struggled deeper into the endless, bare inferno.

At last he reached the MacDonnell Ranges. As the exhausted horseman stared around, his heart caught fire with fierce joy. Great piles of red quartz were sparkling in the brilliant sun. It was true! A range-full of rubies—and all his for the gathering!

Only they weren't rubies. They were garnets, Lasseter found to his dismay. Disillusioned and bitter, he remounted and rode off in the direction he believed would eventually bring him to Adelaide on the coast of South Australia. Here he would return to the sea, deaf evermore to the glowing fantasies of his shipmates.

This much of Lasseter's story rings true to most who have studied it. The confession of a man who found himself on a foolish wild goose chase somehow seems too authentic a detail to have been contrived. The issues concerning Lasseter's credulity, however, are sharply divided over what he claimed happened next.

He traveled south through the desert, day after burning day, week after terrible week. Each morning his scorched eyes fixed hopefully upon the horizon of endless sand hills. Each evening they shut bitterly upon the same view. Gradually his food supplies dwindled until they were gone. Then his parched, swollen lips drained the last tepid drop of water. His horses were gaunt, thirsty and exhausted.

Lasseter became delirious. Goaded by thirst and hunger, he staggered on hopelessly, yet hoping. Then unexpectedly, as though the gods of the desert were enjoying a huge joke at his expense, he stumbled upon $5,000,000,000 worth of gold.

Describing the incident later, Lasseter recalled, "I noticed several heaps of stones at equal distances along the sand. At first I figured they were paving stones dumped there to build a road for desert trucks. But then I couldn't see any wheel tracks. On the chance, I picked up a chunk of stone and broke it open. Then I saw the gold—flakes of solid gold!"

Lasseter believed he had stumbled upon an outcrop of precious quartz. He followed the reef for some distance. It disappeared, then cropped out again further on—for as far as his eyes could see. He was too weak and ill to trace it to its end. At that ironic moment, he would eagerly have given $1,000,000,000 of the fortune under his feet for a cup of water and a crust of bread.

Dazed at his discovery, Lasseter jammed a few specimens of the quartz in his pack. Then he staggered on with his stumbling horses. This wild empire of gold, he determined grimly, would not be the cemetery of young Harry Lasseter. But it soon proved the graveyard of his panting horses, which died of thirst.

Now utterly alone, and himself on the brink of death, Lasseter wandered on in delirium. His skin, where clothes did not cover it, was black as an aborigine's. His throat was on fire with thirst, and his ribs chafed against his shirt. The temptation to lie down and surrender to the desert was overwhelming. Lasseter kept on.

At first he thought it was a mirage of his deranged mind. But when the man's figure grew larger as it came toward him, Lasseter broke into an hysterical cry of joy. A human being! The man's name was Harding, and he was a surveyor. Lasseter's hand shook as he lifted a cup of precious water to his lips. He had to restrain himself from tearing ravenously at Harding's damper—bushman's bread, baked in campfire ashes out of flour, water and salt.

There had been a miracle on the desert. Lasseter was saved.

Back in civilization, Harding closely examined Lasseter's specimens of quartz. Convinced that the little blond youth had discovered a reef of astonishing wealth, he pleaded with Lasseter to lead an expedition back to the desert's golden highway.

For three years Lasseter stonily refused. The nightmare of tortured months on the baking sands was still too vivid. Not even for $5,000,000,000 in gold would he risk the horrors which had once almost claimed his life. But the surveyor persisted, pledging a well-organized company, excellent equipment and a large camel team.

Finally Lasseter allowed himself to be persuaded. Harding organized the expedition, and the prospector led it, guiding himself by landmarks which he recognized. Traveling through the desert swiftly and safely, the party finally reached the golden highway.

Harding was beside himself with joy. They followed the reef for full ten miles, estimating it to be at least 100 feet deep and 12 feet wide. According to Lasseter, they then took samples and set about returning. This seems strange to me. If Harding was convinced that Lasseter was telling the truth, why a dangerous excursion into the desert just for samples, which Lasseter already had? Wouldn't they have gone prepared to mine the gold? I found no key to this puzzle in records of Lasseter's testimony.

On the way back to the coast—this is still only Lasseter's unsupported story—he and Harding took bearings with their watches. But at journey's end they found that both their watches were an hour out. That meant any subsequent return to the golden highway would again have to depend upon Lasseter's recognition of landmarks.

Here are more grounds for suspicion. Would men setting out on so vital an expedition be thoughtless enough to leave compasses behind? Even if it hadn't occurred to Lasseter, Harding was a surveyor. Was this a logical oversight for one of his profession? Add to these doubts the fact that this mishap—if it is to be believed—left Harry Lasseter's personal memory as the only map to the gold, and you have a highly convenient series of coincidences.

The samples that Harding and Lasseter brought back were assayed, the ex-sailor claimed, at three ounces of gold to the ton. But before a gold mining company could be formed, Harding died. (Another coincidence, which removed Lasseter's chief witness.) Lasseter sought to gain the backing of investors and speculators. Not one would believe him. Disheartened and disgusted, the discoverer of Australia's golden highway return to the sea. And he remained at sea for almost thirty years.

In all the later investigations of Lasseter's authenticity, a few other facts remain puzzling to me. Why was no attempt made to find and cross-examine the men who made up the party that accompanied Lasseter and Harding on the second trip to the Reef? Their word would have been as valuable as Harding's. What about the sources that supplied the expedition's equipment and camels? What about the office that assayed the samples they brought back?

As it is for everything that happened just described, there is only the unsubstantiated word of Harry Lasseter. As far as I can judge, there has not even been proof that a surveyor named Harding actually existed. All of which is the more amazing in the light of what happened some thirty years later.

In 1930, almost fifty but still with a springy, if rolling, gait, Harry Lasseter walked into the Sydney office of the Australian Workers' Union. He was shabbily dressed, but the Union's elderly president, John Bailey, quickly determined that he was no ordinary panhandler. As Lasseter told his story, Bailey became impressed.

He had the sailor repeat the tale again for the benefit of his son, Ernest, and a young aviator named Errol Coote. They, too, were convinced that Lasseter was telling the truth. The three men decided to organize a new expedition to the golden highway. They set about bringing other men into the venture and raising capital.

Some of the new men approached, however, were more skeptical. Why had Lasseter waited thirty years before seeking new backing for an expedition? He had given up hope of being believed, Lasseter explained. But now, before he grew too old, he wanted to make one last effort. Lasseter had described the reef as being not far from a light mulga forest, near the border that separated Western from Cen-

tral Australia. As far as any authority knew, there was no mulga in that area. Lasseter doggedly insisted there was.

A flight lieutenant named Ulm, later to die heroically in action with the R.A.A.F., posed the most damning question of all. He had made calculations based on Lasseter's statement that Harding and he had found their watches one hour out upon reaching the coast, after taking bearings on the reef. That, the flier declared sarcastically, would locate the reef somewhere in the Indian Ocean!

Gold fever dies hard. None of these objections could shake the enthusiasm and conviction of Lasseter's newly-found champions. Even the flier Ulm, despite his own misgivings, offered his assistance to the planned expedition. And it is significant that among those who credited Lasseter's story as genuine were bushmen who knew the desert well, and old-time prospectors who were satisfied with Lasseter's answers to their sharp questions.

News of the impending search inflamed all of Australia. The Commonwealth Government itself offered free stores for the party and free transportation to the tiny desert township of Alice Springs, which was to be the interior base of operations. An English car company donated two specially-built 6-wheel, 2½-ton desert trucks. The Atlantic Union Oil Company supplied 600 gallons of free gas. Financiers by the score fought for shares in the venture.

All on the word of one man: Harry Lasseter.

The expedition attracted top men. The leader chosen was F. Blakely, a member of Parliament and a respected veteran of the outback. Next in command was a distinguished explorer, Captain Blakiston-Houston, aide-de-camp of the governor-general himself. The expedition would have aerial reconnaisance ahead of it, as well as a liaison plane flown by Errol Coote between the party and operations base at Alice Springs.

Harry Lasseter would be official "guide" for the party.

DURING preparations at Alice Springs, a disconcerting episode took place. In conversation with the postmaster, Lasseter recalled that when he had been in Alice Springs thirty years before, the post office had had only one or two employees.

"You sure have grown some!" he grinned.

"Why, no." The postmaster looked puzzled. "We had thirty men here in those days—more than now. Had to. We were the only town around here to serve the whole outback."

Lasseter's companions exchanged swift glances. Later, talking it over among themselves, they agreed the little bow-legged man's mistake could have been a trick of faulty memory. After all, he *was* getting on in years. To doubt him now was unthinkable heresy.

Loaded with 600 gallons of gas, 100 gallons of water and two tons of provisions and tools, the trucks moved out of Alice Springs. There was no road out to where they were going. The trucks rocked, bounced, slid and stuck. Most of the time, instead of the trucks advancing the expedition, the expedition was advancing the trucks. Fifty-yard strips of cocoanut matting were laid under the wheels in soft sand, for mile after weary mile.

One day a truck's exhaust pipe grew so hot that it set desert shrubs on fire. Someone screamed a warning. If the fire reached the 600 gallons of gas . . . Men scrambled out of the trucks with extinguishers, sacks and blankets. Sweating and cursing, they beat at the spreading, almost invisible tongues of flame.

It was a desperate fight against precious seconds. All might perish at any moment in a wild explosion, a belch of volcanic fire, and giant columns of black, rolling smoke. But no man fled. Each fought valiantly, despite legs that shook with terror. Slowly, too slowly for agonized minds, the fire was brought under control. Then the last tongue of flame was savagely stamped out.

The men collapsed limply on the sands.

But disaster had only begun to strike. Pilot Coote, traveling with the ground party until he found a safe landing area for his plane, left in a small truck driven by a man named Colson. They returned to a spot 240 miles from Alice Springs, where Coote had parked the plane after his first hop into the desert.

Colson watched from the truck as the pilot made his take-off. The plane soared a few yards, and suddenly the motor be-

gan to cough. Horrified, Colson saw the plane stagger sideways, wobble out of control, then crash nose first into mulga. He grabbed an axe from the truck and raced toward the twisted wreckage.

Coote was slumped in the cockpit, badly hurt. Colson hacked at the debris until he could pull the pilot free. A hasty examination showed that Coote had a smashed elbow, a five-inch hole in his hip, and an arm that stuck out at right angles to his body. Colson loaded him into the truck and raced for Alice Springs.

Coote lived. He recovered slowly in a hospital, while the expedition waited in the desert for the arrival of his plane. Although he could scarcely walk, the pilot made arrangements to secure another plane. Before Colson left in the truck to rejoin the expedition, Coote told the driver he would fly out to meet him at Ayers Rock, a tremendous, dome-shaped mountain of red stone.

Days later reluctant hands lifted Errol Coote into his new plane. He waved a laughing reassurance to his doctor as he took off. In a few hours he saw beneath him the giant mound of Ayers Rock, called "Oolera" by the aborigines. Five miles in circumference, it rose 1,200 feet above the desert. Caves worn in the rock by eternal sandblast were visible as he set the plane down neatly in the long, cool ellipse of its shadow.

There was no sign of the driver Colson. Coote wasn't worried. He had a few days' food, and he discovered a claypan—desert well—nearby. He spent most of that day lying beneath the wing of his plane. And the next day. And the next. The heat was unbearable.

Suddenly he had no food left. And, to his horror, he discovered that the relentless sun had turned his water hole into a bowl of baked red earth.

Days went by. Days that brought thunder and high winds that whirled the sand in columns. But no rain. And no Colson. Coote, still recuperating from the injuries of his crash, soon grew too weak to walk. He lay helplessly beneath the wing of his empty-tanked plane, waiting for death, too realistic to hope.

Suddenly, as Lasseter claimed it had happened to him thirty years before, help arrived at the last agonizing moments. It was Colson, the man who had already saved Coote's life once. His truck had broken down in the desert. Returning wearily on foot to Alice Springs, Colson had found a message radioed back from the expedition.

The expedition's magnificent trucks had broken down, too. They were useless in the trackless, scrub-covered wasteland. Leader Blakely wanted camels brought out to replace them. So Colson had hired camel teams in Alice Springs, and set out again toward Ayers Rock as fast as the haughty-bowed ships of the desert would travel.

Coote joined Colson, and the two men set out to catch up with the expedition. When they finally did, they found that all their ordeals, suffering and efforts had been in vain. Because the expedition itself was on the verge of breaking into a thousand bitter pieces.

IN THEIR absence, with the passing of each day, the men of the expedition grew more and more suspicious of Harry Lasseter. As they came to know him better, they found him gifted with an amazing imagination, as one man put it bitingly.

Once Lasseter pointed to a small mulga bush and remarked cheerfully, "Here's the very tree I hitched my hammock to!" The bush was closer to three than thirty years.

While the billy boiled over the evening campfire, Lasseter confided to his comrades that he had once been a "radio artist"—in fact, the first man to make Kipling famous by reciting "Gunga Din" over the air. To convince skeptics, he declaimed the poem into the night air of the desert.

Eyebrows really raised over Lasseter's assertion that he was the engineer who had designed Sydney's famous Harbor Bridge, which was then in the process of construction. When one of the party, who had had all of this he could stand, burst out with a choice Australian epithet of scorn, Laseter grew indignant and sulky.

Afraid of antagonizing him with disbelief—Lasseter's touchiest spot—the men of the expedition cautiously decided to humor his "whims." If Lasseter said he built the Sydney Bridge, then he built it. For the five billion dollars in gold he was leading them to, he could be Napoleon if he wanted to.

The expedition's water began to run low. Tempers frayed in the deadly monotony of the desert. But the long-brewing explosion finally came when Lasseter took "bearings" one day, and announced that they had traveled 150 miles too far north. "We better go back," he declared calmly, "and start in at a different point."

The expedition's infuriated leader, Blakely, burst into angry language. The men were disgusted. Blakely sent a radio message off to the expedition's financial backers in Sydney. "Too risky and vague," was the curt verdict. "Return at once!"

Lasseter raged like a madman. They were cowards, quitters, fools! Five billions in gold waiting for them—and they were sneaking back to Sydney with their tails between their legs! The blind fools! Well, he'd show them! He'd go on *alone*—and they wouldn't get a penny of that fortune . . . not a penny!

Blakely, unable to persuade the infuriated man to return with the expedition, agreed to let him have two camels, and to leave with him a dingo-hunter and crack bushman named Paul Johns. Johns, who knew the desert country well, had never found any trace of a reef in it. But he consented to go with Lasseter, despite his disbelief in the existence of the golden highway.

The expedition returned to Alice Springs in gloomy exhaustion. The other two men went on deeper into the desert. Troubles broke out afresh for Lasseter. The camels became unruly and almost unmanageable. The food spoiled. Water holes grew fewer and further apart. When their food ran out, Lasseter and Johns lived on half-cooked kangaroo brought down by the latter's Winchester .22.

Through all of this Harry Lasseter continued to "recognize" landmarks, as Johns smiled ironically without speaking. One night, some hours after he had fallen asleep, Johns awoke abruptly with an uneasy feeling. He sat up quickly.

Lasseter was coming toward him with a handful of stones.

"What are you doing?" Johns snapped.

Lasseter hesitated a moment. Then he said, "While you were sleeping, I walked for thirty miles. I've found the Reef! See—here's the proof!" He held out the closed fist clenching stones.

"Which way did you go?"

"I won't tell you."

"Let's see the specimens."

Lasseter quickly put the rocks behind his back. "No!"

"You're a liar!" Johns laughed harshly.

Lasseter uttered a hoarse cry. He hurled the stones furiously at the disbeliever. Johns threw himself at the bowlegged little man, and the two fought wordlessly in the darkened sands. Lasseter managed to draw his gun, but his thumb caught in the hammer. Johns tore it out of his hands and threw it into the spear-like spinifex.

Lasseter was no match for the brawny dingo-hunter. Pinned helplessly beneath the stronger man, he finally ceased struggling. The two men glared at each other in open hatred. Then Johns let Lasseter get to his feet. Each man fell to loading a camel in bitter silence. Lasseter scrawled a note to the Alice Springs police, and another to an old friend named Johansson.

Johns, in the Aussie tradition of fair play even between enemies, agreed to deliver these. Then he moved out eastward along the sands illuminated by pale moonlight. Lasseter headed deeper west, into the heart of the desert—first of the expedition to believe in himself . . . and the last.

The note for Johansson was an urgent request by Lasseter for his friend to join him. Johansson tried, but he never reached Lasseter. Alice Springs police found Johansson's body in the desert, where he had been murdered by aborigines.

TWO airmen named Hamre and Pittendrigh flew out over the desert to search for both men. Their plane ran out of gas, and they were forced to land in a stretch of wasteland they promptly named "Hell's Airport." With little food or water, and no ammunition for shooting 'roos, they were hardly more than living skeletons 21 days later, when they were rescued by an R.A.A.F. plane.

The expedition's company finally hired Robert Buck, owner of Tempe Downs Station, to search for Harry Lasseter. Buck set out with a camel team and blacktrackers. In eleven weeks he covered 1,000 miles, a record for the inferno of Central Australia. He, too, almost lost his life in that molten world where nothing could live but mulga scrub, tough "desert oak" and roving tribes of the world's only Stone

Age people, the Australian aborigines.

Buck's native boys traced Lasseter from the ashes of campfires. From time to time they discovered cryptic messages he had carved in the trunks of trees. One morning they came across a tribe of Luritchas. Buck noticed that the women were wearing strange-looking, shiny belts. These proved to be strips of unrolled camera film.

He questioned the tribal chief sharply.

"Him white feller him die," the old aborigine explained.

They led him to where the white feller lay. It was Harry Lasseter, who had died January 30, 1931, at the age of fifty. Beside the little man's body lay an empty revolver, a tattered ground-sheet, and campfire ashes. In his pocket was a note Lasseter had scrawled on his 78th day without food, almost completely sand-blind.

"I am dying," it read. *"Goodbye, Rene darling, wife mine, and don't grieve. Remember you must live for the children now, dear. My last prayer is God be merciful to me a sinner and be good to those I leave behind . . . Harry."*

Robert Buck buried him, and fenced the grave around. He carved the dead man's tombstone—the one word "Lasseter"—on a nearby tree, where it can still be seen today near Shaw Creek in the Petermann Ranges. Then Buck began the long, dangerous journey home.

Since Lasseter's death, dozens of companies have sprung up to find the golden highway. Expedition after expedition has set out hopefully across the merciless sands. Every one without exception has met with stark disaster—hunger, thirst and death.

All have had to be rescued by search parties which, in turn, often nearly perished themselves.

Some Australians believe the whole thing was a hoax concocted by Harry Lasseter out of vainglory and as a shrewd plan to put himself on a payroll for as long as the expedition lasted. Some even think that Lasseter is still alive . . . that his reported death by Robert Buck was a scheme to cash in on insurance money in which they allege Buck took part for a share. This unfounded supposition persists despite Buck's reputation as a thoroughly honest man.

And there are some diehards who are convinced that Harry Lasseter, despite the infirmities of mind he displayed in his last years, had really told the truth. That somewhere out in the burning desert of Central Australia, waiting for a lucky adventurer, is a $5,000,000,000 highway of solid gold.

It's all yours—if you'll stake your life on Lasseter's word.

If he was right. And if you live to prove it.

AS INTIMATE as a CABIN CAR

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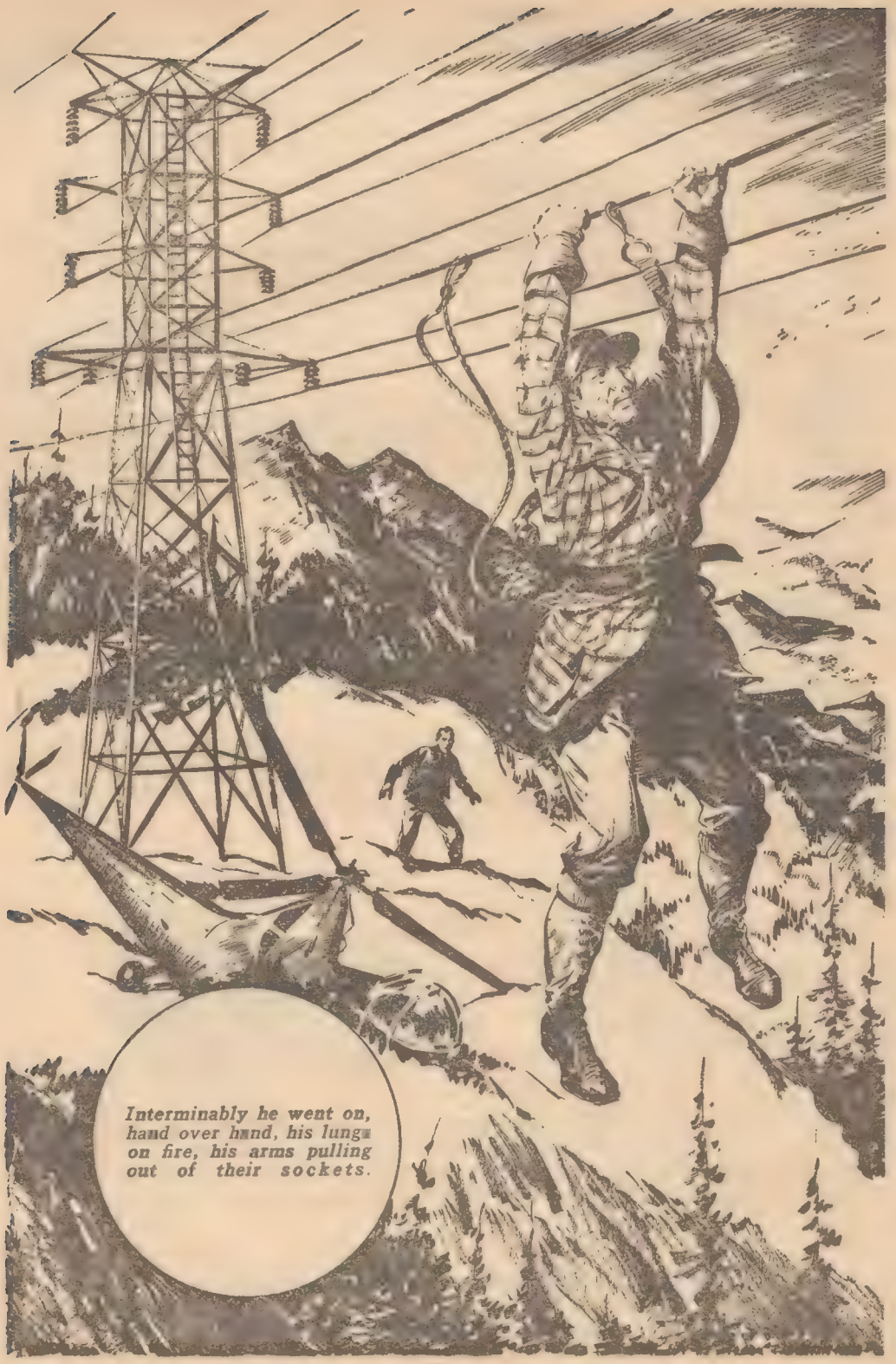
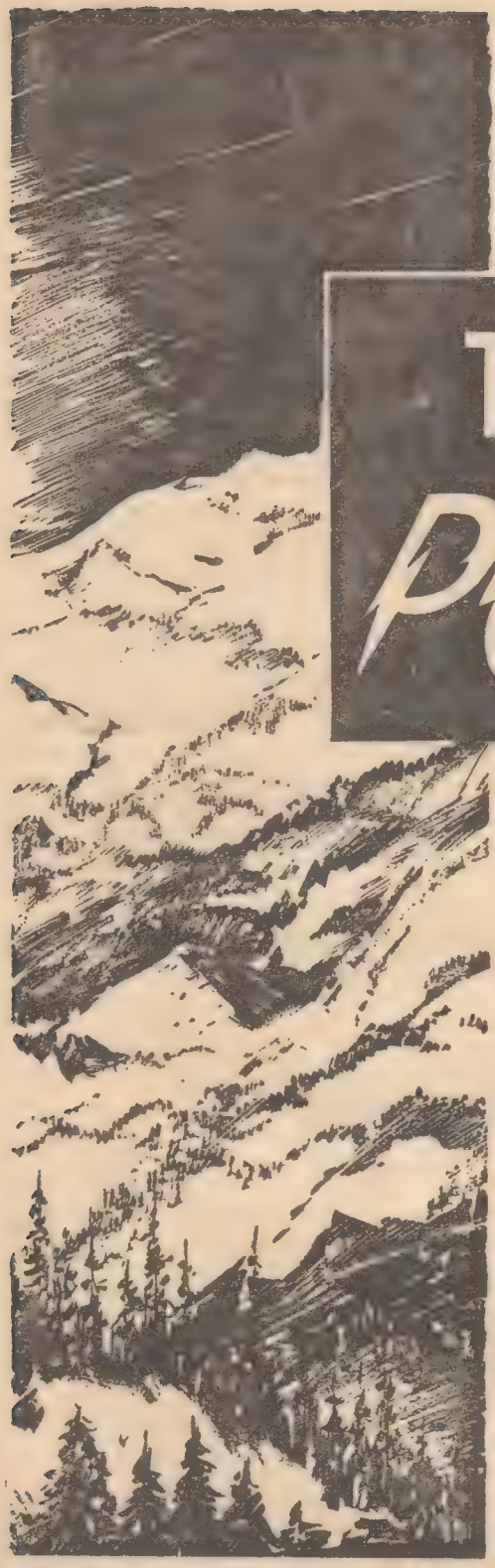
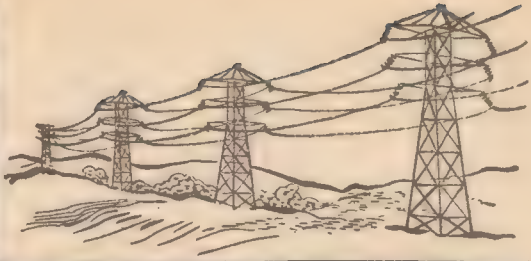

Interminably he went on, hand over hand, his lungs on fire, his arms pulling out of their sockets.





TEST OF POWER

By

ROBERT J. McCAIG

POP FREMONT was worried. It showed in the deep frown on his wrinkled, dark-tanned face. It showed in the tenseness of his lean old frame as he stood on the porch of the Skeleton Creek patrol house, staring down the mountain road into the lengthening shadows of the fall evening. Unless the hunch which had been gnawing at him for the past month was entirely wrong, trouble was rushing toward him in the sedan which had just swung around the curve into sight. For the flashing crimson and bright gold marked it as one of the Northern Hydro fleet, and the driver barreling it up the twisting trail must be Clint Rand, the new division superintendent.

ILLUSTRATED BY MONROE EISENBERG

As Pop left the porch and moved toward the gate to admit the car, he tried once again to tell himself that his worries were groundless. Surely his thirty-five years of service with the big power company and his faultless record as patrolman at Skeleton Creek in the last twelve years would count heavily for him. Yet the nagging knowledge persisted that he was slowing down, and reports over the grapevine of the ruthless efficiency of Clint Rand, the new super, made Pop fear the possibility that the shakeup in the central division might hit Skeleton Creek. Now Rand was here.

REACHING the gate, Pop Fremont swung it open just in time for the big car to roll through. He shut it carefully, and walked up to where the car had stopped in front of the patrol house. He remembered to conceal his slight rheumatic limp as he approached the driver who had stepped out and was standing impatiently, slapping his keycase nervously against the palm of his hand.

"Pop Fremont? I'm Clint Rand, superintendent of the central division. I'm making a swing around the property getting acquainted, and I found I had just time enough to see you and get back to Marston tonight. How are you?" He stuck out a big hand and gave Pop a quick, firm handshake.

"Glad to know yuh," responded Pop, looking over his new boss. The superintendent was a big man, several inches taller than Pop's five-eleven, and certainly thirty years younger than Pop's well-preserved sixty-three. Rand was powerfully built, with the look of an athlete, except for a slight thickening around the belt-line. His dark hair was beginning to recede a little at the brow, and his full face had just a suggestion of jowls.

Rand was frankly surveying the wiry old patrolman, but his face revealed no indication of his impressions. Abruptly, he nodded once to some thought of his own and turned away.

"How about looking over the place?" he asked, and then without waiting for an answer, strode off down the path. Pop followed, sure that even Rand could find no opportunity to criticize the way the station had been kept up.

Rand's inspection was fast but thorough. He looked over the buildings, strode through the spotless four room cottage, checked water system and drainage. Pop tagged along, answering Rand's terse, pointed questions just as curtly. Reluctantly, Pop admitted to himself that the sharp eyes of the new super missed little, and the questions showed he knew what to look for, as far as sloppy maintenance was concerned.

Apparently satisfied, Rand strode from the house up the gravel path toward the air-break switch, fifty yards away. Here was the reason for the location of the patrol station, for here the tall steel towers of the Marston-Coronado power line paused for a moment and stooped to a squat switch structure whose three big horngaps were now closed. Then the towers paraded on to the north toward Coronado and its fabulous mines. In great steps up the steepening ledges, the arcs of heavy copper glowed brightly in the setting sun, giving no hint of the surging power that swept along them at 132,000 volts. The thirty-foot wood poles of the telephone line which paralleled the towers seemed to be hurrying as they tried to keep up with their tall neighbors.

Rand looked briefly at the switch, then stared north toward the point where the slashed clearing went out of sight amid the ridges guarding the "Hump," the sheer backbone of the Bighorn Range.

"Pretty tough patrol, that?" he asked, pointing.

"Pretty tough anytime," assented Pop, "but in winter she's a hellcat. Why, many's the time I . . ."

But the young superintendent had swung on his heel and was striding back toward the house. Pop stared after him a moment, smiled wryly, and followed. Reaching the house, Rand dropped into one of the rustic armchairs on the porch, skinned the cellophane from a cigar and lit it with exaggerated care. Pop seated himself facing Rand, built a cigarette, and inwardly nervous, waited for the superintendent to speak.

Finally the younger man looked directly at the old patrolman and gave his verdict.

"Fremont, I'm not going to beat around the bush. At sixty-three, you've worked for Northern Hydro thirty-five years, and

have only two years to go for a pension. You have a fine record and I've heard you want to stay here those two years. But there isn't any room for sentiment in the power business. You're slowing down. If I let you stay here, you'll go out on patrol some winter day, your old heart or legs will give out, and we'll find you in some coulee the next spring. I'll give it to you cold turkey—I'm transferring you and putting in a younger man at Skeleton Creek."

Pop heard the news with cold dismay.

"What's the new job yuh got for me?" he asked carefully.

"Well-l, it's easy. A good town job, maybe not as much pay, but one a man your age can handle. Sort of a janitor job at the Marston Sub."

"What?" yelped Pop in horrified disbelief. "Janitor? You mean I'm goin' to push a broom and clean spittoons for a bunch of guys I used to boss when I was gang foreman at Marston? Maybe some of the young punks I hadda teach how to make a hotstick tie when I was city foreman at Corinth before I come up here? Hell, Rand, I ain't no broken-down lineman, I can still hike a stick better'n most of the kids you got on the payroll these days. Nope, nothin' doin'!"

"I'm afraid you don't get the picture, Fremont," said the superintendent coldly. "I'm telling you that the Skeleton Creek job is going to be filled by a younger man. This highline must be kept going to keep the water out of the Coronado Mines—if it went out, and the Falls City tie failed at the same time, that underground river would do a million dollars damage to the Coronado workings in twenty-four hours. And while *I'm* superintendent of the central division, I'm not going to get that kind of a black mark against *my* record. So come down to earth and face the facts."

POP FREMONT'S blue eyes, faded by the sunlight of the high places, fairly shot sparks at Rand. But his voice was strangely calm as he answered.

"Rand, I've seen big shots come and go for a lotta years. I've had good jobs myself, I even gave up a important one when I come up here twelve years ago. There was just one reason, my wife's health. I never regretted it, I figger Mary had about ten extra years, happy years, o' life because I did.

"Mary an' me built this place up from nothin', even if every stick of it does belong to Northern Hydro. Even when Mary was real sick, the year before she died, she loved it. I feel close to Mary here. Maybe if I had that little place over on the Lake we was payin' on for when I retired—but her sickness set that plan back, though I think if I had two more years here I can swing it.

"But it ain't the money. It's the idea of pullin' up all my roots here, movin' to a strange place, and takin' a two-bit job among the very men I taught their trade. Hell, Rand, I got some pride. No, I don't think I'm goin' to take your offer!"

"You mean you're going to quit?" snapped Rand.

"Nope, I'm going to stay right here at Skeleton Creek!"

The superintendent snorted.

"You must be touched in the head, old-timer. I'm telling you that you have to take the job I'm offering you, or you are going down the pike, regardless of your record."

Pop Fremont shook his head.

"Maybe R. B. Kearney give you a free hand to shake up the personnel. Bein' general manager, likely he did. But he's the same guy that grunted for me back in the twenties when he was a green kid just outta college. Now I never traded on it before, but the chief will remember who it was that pulled him out of a flamin' hell the night the Silver King sub blew up. And those scars on his arms will remind him who brought him back from the dead with a solid hour of artificial respiration. Nope, I think the chief will override you in my case, Rand."

Rand stood up, his face dark with anger.

"Pure bluff, Fremont. And I never let any man bluff me when I was assistant super of the southwest division, nor in three years in the air force. I just don't bluff! So you had better get started packing."

With this parting shot, the superintendent stamped down the steps and got into his car. The motor roared, and the rear wheels sprayed gravel as the big sedan jumped ahead. Pop let Rand open the

gate for himself, then he strolled down and closed it as the red and gold car surged down the dirt road, trailing a high plume of dust behind it as it stormed toward Keno, twenty miles away.

Yet Pop Fremont was filled with misgivings as he came back to the house to prepare a belated supper. Clint Rand was a hard man, bullheaded with the confidence of youth. Perhaps R. B. Kearney couldn't afford to let his subordinate's prestige suffer and would regretfully sacrifice Pop Fremont to the cause of general discipline. But Pop counted on Kearney's support, as well as that of Tip Marcus, the transmission supervisor, and several other old-timers in positions of authority.

Still, after his encounter with Rand's barbed-wire personality, Pop Fremont was not easy in his mind. He knew that he had made an enemy, and even if he got the backing of the general manager, he had two strikes on him. Winter would soon be sweeping down on the Bighorns in all its ferocity; winter and its tough patrols. Pop went out to do his chores in a mechanical manner. His fight had just begun,

For the next few days, life at Skeleton Creek was perturbed. Butch, the sheepdog, and Tiger, the yellow tomcat, dropped their eternal feud, as if sensing their master's preoccupation. Then one evening the telephone rang the station call. Pop answered.

"Pop, you old heathen, what kind of a round was that you had with Clint Rand?" asked a familiar voice.

"Hello, R. B., what are you doin' on the company phone at this time o' night?" countered Pop.

"Trying to keep a couple of my best men from chewing each other up," replied the general manager.

"Well, sir, Rand give me a proposition I didn't think was fair, and I just turned him down!"

Kearney chuckled.

"Sounds just the way you would do it, too. Well, Pop, he really has his neck bowed, but we had a long talk, and I finally got him soothed down. I know you are a spavined old wreck with one foot in the grave, but I wouldn't let Clint know I thought so. Finally I got him to agree that you could stay on in that tag-end of creation, but I agreed that the first time you slipped up, I dropped out of the picture."

"Thanks, chief, you know well as anybody the reasons I want to stay here. And that proposition he put up to me was downright insultin'."

"Sure, sure," soothed Kearney. "But remember, Pop, I gave him a job to do, and he's been showing results. If it wasn't for —well, I just wanted to say I can't interfere any farther. From now on it's strictly up to you, and that boy has his eye on you. The first time you slip, it's Katy-bar-the-door. If you can't cut 'er this winter, I'll feel mighty bad about it, but—"

"I can cut 'er all right, chief. I can still outride, outwalk, and outclimb any young guy you got on the payroll, and I ain't barrin' Clint Rand, either!"

"That's the spirit, you old rooster," applauded Kearney. "I hope your dauber will be as high next spring as it is now."

Pop hung up the receiver, feeling greatly relieved. Now he knew exactly where he stood, and he swore to himself that the combination of Clint Rand and a Bighorn winter wasn't going to get him down.

Strangely enough, the winter did prove to be one of those freak open seasons which hit the high country once in a coon's age. Pop was prepared by mid-November, with his supplies in, his firewood cut, and his underground gasoline tank filled. But still the snow and cold held off, and on Christmas Day he was able to drive his battered old car to Keno and celebrate the occasion with some friends. On New Year's day, as he pulled down the old calendar and tacked up the new one, he could glance through the window and see Tiger stretched lazily on the porch in the warm rays of the slanting sun.

CHAPTER II

STREAK OF LUCK

JANUARY was half gone before a big snow hit the Bighorns. Even then, though the thermometer dropped well below zero, and it snowed and snowed, the usual driving gale held off. In a few days all roads were blocked deep. Pop was locked in his little world, connected to the outside only by his ancient radio and the slender thread of the company telephone.

But the phone line stayed up, the big power line hummed contentedly along without interruption, and Pop Fremont kept busy with his many tasks around the house and grounds.

Yet in his mind, there lurked always the discomforting thought of Clint Rand and his ultimatum. He hadn't heard directly from the young superintendent, but the evening gossip session on the telephone line after the late weather report kept him informed of Rand's progress. With regret, Pop learned of other old-timers being demoted, transferred, or retired. It made him feel his age and intensified his dislike for Rand. On the other hand Rand had tightened up the organization, and the grapevine gave him reluctant praise for his handling of the Yellowknife fire and the big December sleet storm. No one had worked harder or put in longer hours than Rand himself, in getting the shattered, twisted transmission lines back into operation.

The weather continued mild, at least in comparison with other winters. Pop Fremont became almost smug, for Rand couldn't take exception to his work when there was none outside of the daily weather reports. In February, there was one case of phone trouble, but Pop snowshoed over the chest-deep drifts to locate the trouble—a broken wire—within a mile of the patrol house. In March came a wicked, week-long blizzard which raised the devil on the other side of the divide, but the Coronado line again rode through without a murmur.

Then the temperature rose gradually from its low of minus forty, and Pop Fremont piled out of bed on the third of April to the gentle music of water dripping from the roof. Looking out, he saw a great blob of snow drop from one of the shrubs in the yard. Pop did a little jig of glee, and turning toward Marston, he shook his fist at the imagined, far off hulk of Clint Rand. For this was the big chinook, the backbone of winter was breaking. In another month even over the Hump the going would be safe. Of course, there was an awful lot of snow this winter . . .

After breakfast, in a more serious mood, Pop got out his gear and checked it carefully. He replaced a few doubtful thongs in his modified bearpaw snowshoes, he filled his packsack with emergency food and equipment, then placed webs, pack, and lineman's gear where it would be handy at a moment's notice. Probably he wouldn't need it, but snowslides and falling trees could do strange tricks when the big thaw came.

Pop wasn't really worried. When three days had gone by, with the trees shedding their heavy burdens of snow, and melting snowbanks sending traceries of black rivulets down the coulees, he felt doubly safe. Then, late in the evening, Pop Fremont's phenomenal streak of good luck ran out.

He was sitting in his easy chair reading, when the fuses on the telephone protective board snapped with a bright blue crackle and the alarm bell rang frantically. He leaped to the phone, shut off the alarm and with nervous fingers replaced the fuses. Turning the crank once to ring the Marston dispatcher, he waited worriedly for an answer. For Pop knew that somewhere in its rugged one hundred and forty-five miles, the Coronado line was in trouble, trouble which had struck hard. Somewhere a tremendous burst of raw power had leaped from its insulated path, and the complicated electrical brains called "relays" had flung open the huge oil switches at Marston and Falls City, killing the line from both ends. And Pop knew, too, that his forty mile patrol was the most vulnerable section of the entire line.

The Marston dispatcher came on, and without preliminary, said tersely, "Watch your ears! I'm going to test."

Pop hung up and stepped back. And again the phone fuses blew and the alarm bell clangored wildly, for the dispatcher had closed in on the Marston end and the trouble had once more kicked the line out. Pop replaced fuses, closed the switches on the phone, and took up the receiver.

"Hello, Phil. Pop Fremont at Skeleton Creek."

"Just about to call you, Pop," advised the dispatcher from his board many miles away. "She's out and tests bad. From the relay action it appears to be quite a ways out. Can you give us a test?"

"Sure. Go ahead."

"Fremont to open the Skeleton Creek-Coronado air break switch and report back."

"Fremont to open the Skeleton Creek-Coronado air break switch, on dispatcher's orders," Pop repeated, and at the dispatcher's O.K., he hung up. Shrugging into a mackinaw, he grabbed a flashlight and hurried up the cleared path to the switch. Standing on the wooden platform, he unlocked the switch arm and freed the chain. Bracing himself, he gave a surging pull on the handle. The balanced linkage above operated, and with a crash, the three contacts came open. After flashing his light above to verify operation, he locked the switch open. From the nearby booth, he called in.

"Fremont to Marston. The Skeleton Creek-Coronado air break switch is open, locked open, and all three blades checked open."

The dispatcher repeated, and told Pop to stand by. Pulling the phone switch, Pop stepped out of the booth. Standing with an ear cocked toward the line, he could imagine the dispatcher in the brightly lighted nerve center of the Northern Hydro system, leaning forward to push a small control button on the miniature board. Above the button a green light would go out and a red one flash on, as the giant oil switch out in the switchyard closed. About now—there! The buzzing hum on the Marston side of the line informed Pop that power was on the line from Marston to Skeleton Creek.

"She's O.K. to you," advised the dispatcher. "Now I'll try her from the other end. I'll call you at the house."

As Pop made his way back to the house, he flashed his light on the deep snow along the path. It had packed down somewhat, but he knew that up toward the Hump it would be deep, sticky, and treacherous. Back in the kitchen, he started checking over his gear once more. Subconsciously, he listened as the jangling phone told its story.

There was the call for Confederate Gulch, the next station north. That would be orders for Swede Erickson to open his switch. Then the Marston call—the switch was open. Now Falls City—an order to close in on the north end. Now Marston again—had the line held? Pop was at the telephone and taking down the receiver almost before his ring was complete.

"It's all yours, Pop" advised the dispatcher. "Falls City tests the line O.K. back to Confederate Gulch, and Swede doubts if he can get more than four or five miles toward the south the way the snow is on his side. Well, we can't do anything tonight, and Coronado is all right as long as the Falls City tie stays in. How does it look for tomorrow?"

"Plenty tough," admitted Pop. "Three to six feet of heavy, packed snow, and water running everywhere. The snow on the slopes is getting loose, too. Well, I asked the man for work when I come here, so I'll be hittin' her as soon as I can see in the morning."

"Right, Pop. I haven't reached Rand or Tip Marcus yet, but they'll probably start a repair crew out to put it up when you locate it. You can't do much with that two-ought copper by yourself if it's a broken wire."

"An' that's a fact," agreed Pop. "Well, if I gotta snowshoe twenty miles tomorra and detour that double-dammed Devil's Canyon, I'm goin' to bed. Tell Leo I'll call at the crack o' dawn."

Pop Fremont did go to bed, but not immediately to sleep. After an easy winter, he was now faced with as bad patrol conditions as he had ever been called upon to attempt. Would his bad knee hold up? Would he play out before he reached the Hump? Pop struggled with these questions for a long time before falling into a troubled sleep.

Before the gray figures of dawn streaked the eastern sky, Pop had cared for his stock, cooked and eaten a hearty breakfast, and dressed for the trail. When he figured that it would be light enough to start within the hour, he went to the phone to call Marston. But on taking down the receiver, all he could hear was the growling hum of a faulted line. Fearfully, he pulled the switch on the Coronado side of the phone. The noise quieted instantly, and with a sigh of relief he cranked the Marston ring.

"Pop Fremont, Leo," he said when the graveyard trick dispatcher answered. "Phone line is open here, it's in trouble on the Coronado side."

"Yeah, it went bad about 2 A.M." informed the dispatcher. "Say, I'm glad to hear from you. We *really* got troubles now!"

"What's new that's worse?" queried Pop.

"The Falls City tie line went down from a washout at midnight, and they tell us it can't be fixed under three days. They gotta build a temporary offset. The Coronado people are screaming to high heaven and Clint Rand is going crazy!"

"Didn't have far to go," grunted Pop. "Well, I'll be starting in about an hour. The way things look, I should have 'er located before the repair crew can get here from Keno—less'n they got a snowmobile."

"That tough, eh? Maybe that is why Rand is so worried. He keeps calling me, he seems to think you are going to fall apart or something. You're not sick, are you, Pop?"

"Oh, the hell with Rand!" yelped Fremont, flaring into anger. "Listen, Leo, you tell Rand that if I don't call in from the emergency cabin on the Hump by seven o'clock tonight, I'll never call myself a patrolman again, an' he can have my time waitin' for me!"

"Attaboy, Pop," chuckled the dispatcher. "Anything else?"

"Yeah. If the Falls City tie is down, it means things is serious. When I run across the trouble I might find it is something I could fix by myself. If I had a clearance I could get the line back two or three hours ahead of the repair crew."

"By the Lord, Pop, I think you're right. Rand isn't going to like it, but you might lose communication, so I'm going to give it to you, even if I catch hell. Just a second."

Pop Fremont waited, knowing the risk the dispatcher was taking. For the rigid laws of the Medes and Persians were vagrant whims compared to the immutability of a power line clearance. From the moment it was given, this section of line would stay dead until released by Pop himself, or until a high official gave the dispatcher absolute proof that Pop was clear of the line and physically unable to turn it in in person. The Coronado Mines might flood to the gallows frames, the lights of twenty cities might stay dark, but no man on the Northern Hydro system would dare close those switches until the prescribed requirements were met.

The dispatcher came back on the line.

"Here you are, Pop. Skeleton Creek—Coronado air break switch open, locked open and all three blades checked open. Confederate Gulch—Coronado air break switch open, locked open, and all three blades checked open."

Pop repeated the switching sequence, and the dispatcher continued: "Clearance to Fremont on the Skeleton Creek—Confederate Gulch section of the Coronado 132 Kv. line."

Pop again repeated, accepting the clearance. The line was now his responsibility.

"Listen, Leo, I won't call you again, I gotta get ready. I'll close the phone line through toward Piegan before I leave. You can open it there. I'll be seein' you."

"Lots of luck, Pop," said the dispatcher. "Oh, say, one thing more. I don't know just what he meant, but Clint Rand said he'd be seeing you somewhere along the line."

"Must be comin' up with the repair crew. He sure as hell ain't goin' to walk from Marston. Well, so long, Leo."

He hung up, went into the kitchen, and checked his gear once more. Satisfied, he waited another twenty minutes. When he could see the angular shape of the nearest tower plainly, he closed the phone switch through and donned his outer garments. He carried his pack outside, and at the switch he strapped on his snowshoes, shrugged into his packstraps, and drawing a deep breath, stepped out onto the smooth snow, heading north. Butch, the dog, tried to follow, but after a few futile lunges into the packed snow, retreated, barking a wistful farewell.

CHAPTER III

DEVIL'S CANYON

AT THIS hour, the surface was still frozen, but the chinook was whispering through the trees. In the good going, Pop swung swiftly along, watching wires.

A mile beyond the station, the heavy going began. Heading due north as straight as an arrow, the line began to climb steeply toward its final nine thousand foot elevation at the Hump. From there it would drop sharply down the opposite slope of the Bighorns toward Coronado and Falls City.

Now Pop Fremont could no longer stay in the slashed clearing, for the towers stepped from pinnacle to pinnacle and

ledge to ledge, while Pop had to detour around coulees, along cliffs, and struggle over game trails through heavy timber. In some places there was a temptation to skip inspection of an isolated span, but from long experience Pop knew the danger of this. Rand would gloat in triumph if the trouble was found on a span Pop had not inspected. And Rand was often in Pop's thoughts, for he was still puzzled by the dispatcher's reference to Rand "seeing him along the line."

As he struggled steadily upward, fighting the now softening snow, he found no line damage. He located one telephone floater and fixed it, but the line remained noisy. Moving on, he conserved his strength as much as possible, grimly aware that the worst going was still ahead. But by noon, his body was drenched with sweat, and his ancient joints creaked alarmingly. Finding a dry log along the trail, he decided to stop for lunch, and with grateful relief he slipped off his pack.

After consuming three thick meat sandwiches and a chocolate bar, he felt much better, and the April sun beamed warmly as he leaned back against the log and rolled a cigarette. He hadn't done so badly so far, he thought. He was considerably past the halfway point, and although the route was steeper ahead of him, it held less timber. The two most disturbing factors were awesome Devil's Canyon, five miles ahead, and the ever-present threat of snowslides. Pop, wise in the ways of the mountains, didn't like the look of things. Yet he had to reach the Hump by seven o'clock.

Deciding speculation was profitless, Pop stood up, tossed his quirly into the snow, and stooped to lace on his snowshoes. He was worried by the way he had stiffened up in this brief stop, and at the soreness of the muscles in the inside of his thighs and the backs of his legs. Some of it would work out with motion, but . . .

Startled by a strange sound, Pop straightened. From the southwest came a steady drone. For a moment he was puzzled, then he recognized it and swore softly.

"By damn! Using a plane! They must be despr't, they tried it before and it never worked in these canyons. Nearly lost one ship in Devil's Canyon, too, before they give it up."

But when the machine hummed into sight over a nearby ridge, Pop's grizzled jaw dropped open in astonishment. Then he realized what the weird looking contraption must be.

"By Godfrey, a cockeyed windmill!" he snorted. "One o' them heeliocopters, I betcha. Allus wanted to see one of 'em!"

He stepped out into the open and whipped off his jacket for a signal. The machine came on slowly, just above the tree tops, its rotor a circle of light topping a glass-enclosed fuselage. As its occupants saw Pop, the machine slowed further, passed him, then backed up a few feet. Purring smugly, it hovered almost motionless thirty feet overhead. A window slid open.

Clint Rand's head popped from the opening.

"Said I would be seeing you, Fremont,"

The machine came on slowly, just above the tree tops.

he shouted, and Pop's amazement must have been very obvious, for Rand was grinning broadly. "Do you want—a—lift?"

"I'm the farmer boy that seen the girafft. I still don't believe it!" Pop yelled back.

"Too rough—too many trees—to land here. How about trouble—on line? Coronado—" The wind carried away some of the superintendent's words, but Pop got the idea.

"O.K. to here! Just had lunch, and I'm goin' on now. Can you spot trouble all right from that contraption?"

"Good—easy enough—except telephone wire—watch that. If—trouble—come back—circle—you turn in clearance."

Pop nodded violently and waved an O.K. as the rotor of the drifting machine began to gain speed. Just then Pop remembered what one of the pilots who had patrolled the Coronado Line in a conventional plane had told him, and he waved frantically and shouted: "Look out for bad downdraft in Devil's Canyon. Pilot told me it's a wicked one!"

Rand's head nodded vigorously, but Pop doubted if Rand had understood the warning. The window slid closed, the 'copter picked up altitude and droned north, soon going out of sight.

Buoyed up by his rest, and the challenge of his unexpected visitors, Pop laced on his webs, donned his pack, and started slogging north.

AN HOUR later, the old patrolman came to a pole which bore a telephone test box on its crossarm. Changing snowshoes for climbers, he went up the pole. Opening the switch, he tested with his portable and found the line still noisy on the Coronado side, but clear toward Marston. Calling Piegan he was connected through to the dispatcher and reported in. As he finished, another voice cut in.

"How's she going, old-timer?" it asked.

"Hey, Tip Marcus! Where are you at?"

"Your place, Pop. Had a devil of a time getting here, too, with drifts belt-deep to a tall Injun. No trouble so far, eh?"

"O.K. to 877, Tip, don't know anything further, unless Rand found it from his seat on high."

"Oh, did you see the helicopter?"

"Yeah, dangdest thing I ever see, too. Passed me about a hour ago, said they'd come back when they found trouble, but no sign of 'em yet. Guess I better keep hoofin'."

"Four of my boys are following your trail, Pop, but they ain't snowshoe champs like you and they got a lot of equipment. Well, I'll tell the Chief the tortoise is gaining on the hare."

Pop yanked the phone clips free, cutting off the supervisor's chuckle.

"That damn Tip Marcus allus did read too much!" he growled as he clambered down the pole.

Half an hour later, Pop Fremont topped the last slant of the hogback just below Devil's Canyon, and flung himself down for a rest. His legs were aching, and his stomach muscles quivered from strain. It was several minutes before his thumping heart calmed down and he could look with a degree of calmness at the barrier lying before him. Devil's Canyon had been a headache to construction men and a nightmare to patrolmen for twenty years.

To the east soared the towering spire of rock called Thunder Peak. Its inner slope, parallel to the power line, was dished out and piled deep with a massive snowfield. Below this, the slope flattened a little, then at the level where Pop stood, it dropped almost sheer into the immense bowl which was the head of Devil's Canyon. From the bowl, the canyon ran west, then north, then east again, forming a great "U" before it rounded the north shoulder of Thunder Peak. The only way to reach the Hump was to detour around the curve of the U, where the peaks on the western side were less precipitous.

The power and telephone lines scorned any detour. From a point a few hundred feet ahead of where Pop was resting, the Coronado line took off. A squat, heavily reinforced tower balanced on the south rim of the bowl, and from it, the line leaped across a thousand feet of sheer space to another tower on a lightly timbered plateau, an island in the center of the U of the canyon. From there, to another tower, from which it spanned the slightly narrower north leg of the canyon in another gigantic leap. From the far northern rim, it ran triumphantly the few remaining spans to the Hump.

The telephone line, less daring, scrambled part way down the canyon walls be-

fore leaping the gap. But where the lines flung themselves across the double barrier in three spans, the patrolman had more than three miles of tough going to inspect these spans.

Pop Fremont got out his binoculars and began to examine the part of the lines visible from his vantage point. He could see the south span, and part of the middle span, but a slight ridge, studded with scrawny timber, interfered with his view of the north tower. As far as the line went it looked all right—wait a minute! He jumped to his feet and moved to one side for a better view. Then he groaned.

Clearly, through the binoculars, he could see the cause of the trouble. A spindly jackpine, grown taller since the last time the clearing was trimmed, had lost its footing in the chinook and toppled, so its scraggly tip rested solidly on one of the power conductors. Pop could see the charred marks where the two heavy surges of power at 132,000 volts, with the entire capacity of the mighty Northern Hydro system behind them, had poured through the damp trunk to the ground.

He cursed that tree, Devil's Canyon, and a patrolman's lot, with heartfelt intensity. Then his weary spirits brightened a bit as a thought struck him. He had a clearance on the line, and the case of trouble was one of the few types which one man could fix by himself. Even if the helicopter had spotted it, it sure would be a laugh on Clint Rand if an old buzzard of a patrolman could fix the trouble, then call in, release his clearance, and tell the dispatcher to "hot 'er up!" while the repair crew was still miles away. By the Lord, he'd do it, and call after it was fixed!

The first problem was to reach the plateau. Pop focused his glasses on a mountain sheep trail which ran along the east rim of the bowl about a third of the way from the lip. Yes, it was almost clear of snow due to the thaw and the steepness of the slope. Anxiously he turned to the snowfield above. Such fields were always treacherous, but this one showed no signs of slippage or cracking. It might hold in the deep gulley for days, or it might go in the next hour. Cautiously Pop weighed the chances, and then decided to risk it.

Jamming his snowshoes upright for a marker just in case, he cautiously made his way through the packed snow at the edge of the bowl. Placing his feet carefully, he followed a little coulee down, and without mishap, arrived at the sheep trail. Here he paused for a moment, glanced at the monstrous masses of snow above, took a deep breath, and walked out on the path.

In that short crossing, Pop Fremont lived several lifetimes. Snow water drenched him, rocks turned under his feet, and worst of all was the dread of those millions of pounds of snow hanging smotheringly above the narrow path. Once, he froze against the wall as a rattle of rock brought his heart into his throat. But nothing happened as a loose boulder bounded down the slope. When he hurried across the last few feet, and scrambled to safety to the level of the island, he refused to think of the unavoidable return crossing.

THE SNOW on the island was shallow. Pop plowed through it, and in a few minutes came to the fallen tree. Wasting no time, he threw a side strain on it with his handline, and with a few strokes of his keen handaxe, severed the butt. A pull on the line, and the tree toppled over, clear of the conductor. The stranded, reinforced wire leaped and twanged as it was relieved of the weight, but when it quieted, it seemed to have suffered little harm. A few burned strands, some bright blisters, but it would serve. The line was clear.

Pop reached for his climbers and belt to hike the nearest phone pole, cut the line clear, and call in. But as he did so, he heard a faint cry. For a moment, Pop thought it was an animal, but when it came again, he knew it was a voice.

In a shuffling, stumbling run, Pop forced his aching legs through the packed snow toward the north rim whence the sound had come. As he topped the low ridge which split the center of the island, he saw, with a shock, what had happened. There, piled partly against the north tower, was a scrambled heap of wreckage. In a crazy jumble of metal, plexiglas, and fabric, with one rotor arm pointing grotesquely toward the sky, were the remains of the helicopter. And leaning against the steel tower, waving a frantic arm, was the tall figure of Clint Rand.

"My God, Pop, I never was so glad to see anybody in my life," he gasped as Pop hurried up.

"What in hell happened?" panted Pop, looking at the wreck. He wondered how anyone had gotten out alive.

"Engine cut out," explained Rand. "Pop, take a look at Corry, I'm afraid he's hurt bad. I managed to drag him out, but he's unconscious."

Pop hurried over to the limp form of the pilot. Pulling aside the coat Rand had used to cover him, Pop made a quick examination of the injured man. From the depths of his pack, Pop got out his first-aid kit. With the expertness of many years of first-aid training, he bandaged a deep, oozing cut in the pilot's scalp.

Rand managed to struggle over on his bad foot, and as Pop worked, Rand explained briefly the events preceding the crash. Corry Lenhart, the pilot, was an old friend of Rand's from Army days. With another pilot and two helicopters, he had hit Marston the day before in the course of an extended demonstration tour. Although helicopter patrol had been under trial on the Coast for some time, Northern Hydro had not tried it, and when the Coronado line went down, Rand jumped at the chance to experiment with the new method under actual service conditions.

They had a little engine trouble before starting, but it seemed to smooth out, and the patrol went perfectly until they reached Devil's Canyon. There they spotted the tree in the line, but before they could turn, the helicopter was caught in the downdraft of the canyon. Lenhart poured the coal to the engine, and managed to claw his way up out of the gorge, but before he could gain altitude, the engine quit cold. In auto-rotation, he tried to set the 'copter down on the island, but the wind swept them back toward the canyon rim. As a last, desperate chance, he had put the machine into the north tower rather than let it be swept into the depths of the canyon.

It had hit hard. Lenhart's head had struck the instrument panel, and Rand had been thrown around and knocked out for a few minutes. He seemed to be all right when he came to, except for a painful ankle injury, but Lenhart was in bad shape. Rand dragged him from the wreckage, tried to make him comfortable, then began the long wait for a rescuer.

"Thank God she didn't burn," he concluded. "How about Corry, Pop?"

Pop finished his work and stood up.

"Not good, Rand. He's got a mighty bad concussion, at least. This boy needs a doctor, and quick." He glanced back at the hazardous route he had come.

"I can't do much myself, but the repair gang is comin' and they'll have to carry him. That's goin' to be one hell of a job. Too bad he can't be flown out."

Rand gave an anguished cry and beat his knuckles against his sore head.

"I must have got *all* my brains knocked out. Why, there's the other ship, the big one, sitting on the field at Marston with a pilot, all ready to go. It could sit down here on that clear spot we were trying to make when we crashed. Call up and get the line hotted up, and then have them send in the big job to fly us all out!"

Pop Fremont grinned in relief.

"Swell, I sure hated the idea of walkin' that sheep trail back, under that snowfield. Well, I'll climb this pole here, cut the line clear, and call 'em."

Carrying belt, hooks, and portable, he started toward the telephone line. But he hadn't taken three steps when he froze in his tracks, and both he and Rand turned to look up at the scooped-out face of Thunder Peak. A faint mutter filled the air. In the gleaming sheet of snow, tiny cracks were growing, and as they watched, the cracks widened with devastating suddenness. The mutter swelled to a roar, then became deafening.

CHAPTER IV

OVER THE WIRE

UNDERNEATH their feet the earth shook as the entire lower half of the snowfield broke loose from its shaky hold on the flank of the peak, and avalanched down into the monstrous bowl of Devil's Canyon. The power wires danced, the telephone line whipped crazily. A cloud of powder snow filled the air. Finally the terrible noise subsided, and an unnatural quiet followed, broken only by the rattle of boulders tumbling down the mountainside in the wake of the slide.

The mutter swelled to a roar, then became deafening.

"My God, I only crossed that place twenty minutes ago. If I had started back —if you hadn't hollered—" Pop mopped beads of sweat from his face, almost stunned by the terrible display of nature's power.

"Now there ain't any out but your cockeyed windmill. The sheep trail must be covered, and even if it ain't the upper half of that snowfield will go any second."

Quickly strapping on his hooks, Pop made his way up the nearest pole. Clipping the wires with his pliers, regardless of the necessity for later repair, he hooked his portable on the Marston side and cranked the generator. After several tries, he unsnapped the clips and came down the pole. He was shaking his head when he returned to Rand.

"No soap," he said wearily as he took off his climbers. "She's short between us and Marston now. I'm goin' over to the rim and take a look."

In a matter of minutes he was back. He walked slowly with deep discouragement written on his face. At Rand's unspoken question, Pop shook his head.

"The engineers thought they had Devil's Canyon licked, but one trick they never thought of was to have her bounce a boulder six hundred foot through the air spang on top of a phone pole. Rand, we're stuck as bad as Robinson Crusoe!"

Rand's broad shoulders slumped. He leaned against the tower and his eyes closed for a moment.

"You and I could tough it out, Pop, but Corry's got to have help," he muttered.

"Damn it, isn't there *anything* we can do?"

"Yup," said Pop Fremont.

Rand's eyes snapped open in surprise. Looking up he saw the old patrolman girding himself with equipment, including some short pieces of rope cut from his handline. As he saw Pop strap his portable telephone over his shoulder, Rand asked in wonder, "What is it, Pop? What are you going to try now?"

"Trail's gone, phone's gone, and your pilot's gotta have help. There's only one thing *to* do. *I'm goin' across on the wire!*"

Rand whistled in amazement. Pop knew that Rand understood instantly what was intended, and Rand must have known, too, what a terrific chance Pop would be taking, exhausted as he was.

Suddenly a great wave of humility struck the tough soul of Clint Rand. He struggled to his feet.

"Pop, you're all man," he said sincerely, swallowing the lump in his throat. "I was so anxious to make a good showing, I treated you like a heel, and I guess there were others, too. It takes something like this to make a man realize he doesn't know all the answers, and maybe the old methods and the old heads are best after all."

"Don't talk like you got a hole in your head, Rand," snapped Pop. "If I make it across and that cockeyed windmill takes you and Lenhart outta here, it'll be a combination of the old ways *and* the new ways you can thank. What you gotta learn is to use the old-timers and the new men, the old methods and the new methods, each one where it can do the job best."

Suddenly embarrassed, he grinned. He stuck out his hand to the superintendent.

"Hell, let's fergit it, Clint. We're all just tryin' to get along and do our jobs the best we know how."

The young superintendent shook hands firmly with the old patrolman, and as Pop Fremont turned away toward his hazardous task, Rand said softly, "The very best of luck to a swell guy, Pop. I only wish I could go along."

Pop started out through the broken snow without a word, but as he topped the ridge, he turned and waved a hand at the big man slumped against the tower. Rand waved in answer, then leaned back to begin the anxious period of waiting.

When Pop reached the heavy tower on the north rim of the bowl, he looked down into the canyon. A huge cone of snow, studded with small boulders, lay against the headwall of the canyon, and every few minutes a few thousand tons of snow would detach themselves from the snowfield above and roar down the slope across the sheep trail. Pop shuddered at the thought of what might have happened.

Resolutely, he turned to the dangerous task at hand. Hitching up his equipment, he placed a foot on the step bolts at the corner of the tower, and forced his tired legs to carry him upward. At the top, he stepped to a jumper wire, and holding on with one hand, he fastened the snaps of his safety around the wire on the outside phase, beyond the dead-end insulators. The safety and belt were looped around his middle, and as an added precaution, he fastened two loops of rope around himself and the wire. When he was sure that his rigging was satisfactory and his equipment secured, he took a deep breath and launched himself out over the space which dropped a sheer thousand feet below.

Although the wire on which he was suspended looked fragile, it had a steel core sheathed in copper, and Pop's one hundred and seventy pounds put little extra burden on its giant strength. Nor was he worried about his well cared-for, tested lineman's gear. It was his old body, worn out by the day's exertions, that might fail him.

Cautiously, he let himself down hand over hand along the arc of the span. The thin wire cut his hands through his gloves, for he didn't dare let himself slide free. The belt sawed him cruelly, and his shoulders began to ache from the strain.

AFTER agonized minutes that seemed hours, Pop reached the center of the span. Here at the neutral point of the sag, he could rest a moment. He noticed that his weight pulled his wire to a point several feet below the other two phase wires, and he waited while it gradually stopped swaying. Then he started toward the south tower.

Here began the real test of strength and endurance. For now he must use his unaided arms to pull himself up a steepening slope. Several times his rigging caught,

(Continued on page 140)

RESTRICTED!

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

By GEORGES SURDEZ

THE STORY THUS FAR:

THE year is 1947; the place, the Jura Mountain region of France close to the Swiss border—where BRUCE KERRIGAN, former OSS officer now employed by an American firm in Paris, has gone to rest and recover from a nervous condition brought on by the war. He is staying at the Matignon farm, home of his war-time friend, ALAIN MATIGNON, who had been killed at his side during a mission into Occupied Brittany. Kerrigan's need for a change of scene had coincided with the receipt of a letter from Alain's young brother, NICOLAS, begging the American to visit the Matignons and mysteriously hinting an urgent need for his help.

At the Matignon home, Kerrigan meets MOTHER JEANNE, and an older brother, PROSPER, a big, moody chap who manages the extensive farm. From Nicolas and others he learns of the mystery-shrouded, barb-wire barricaded sanatorium atop the mountain close by, operated by a DR. NORDSTROM, known to have been a collaborationist during the Nazi Occupation. No one from the village is allowed inside its heavily-guarded gates and the wealthy patients presumably receiving treatment there are never seen outside. And Nicolas reveals the reason for his SOS to Kerrigan. His friend, ALBERT, a handsome, reckless lad somewhat older than Nicolas, had become involved with a girl employed at the Sana and, shortly after, had disappeared.

The automatics were lifted. They tapped out in unison, and the prisoners tumbled to the ground.

BEJART, a trusted friend of the Matignons, calls at the farm with DR. SEZILLE, former Resistance leader. Sezille confides to Kerrigan his hope of piercing the veil of secrecy surrounding the Sana and exposing the illicit activities he believes are taking place there.

One day walking back to the farm, Kerrigan runs into LEONARD, Nordstrom's chauffeur, who has been lying in wait for him. In a bruising fight, the chauffeur is decisively beaten. But he warns the American that Nordstrom is determined to get rid of him one way or another.

A few days later, Kerrigan learns that Leonard is dead. The report calls it "pneumonia" but he fears the beating he gave the man may have been the true cause. Worried, Kerrigan goes to see Dr. Sezille in Aurebois. The doctor believes Nordstrom caused Leonard's death with the fanatic purpose of scaring the American away. At dinner, Kerrigan meets Sezille's four lieutenants: CHORIS, BRENAY, CARMELIN and BELDON. Sezille tells the others he believes Prosper Matignon knows more than he admits about the Sana.

Prosper is picked up by Sezille's men and persuaded to talk. He reveals that during the war he was a member of a syndicate headed by Dr. Nordstrom. With the connivance of German police, quartermasters, clerks, etc., huge quantities of supplies originally seized by the occupying army were stolen and re-sold to the Nazis—the loss being eventually sustained by the French people. When the Americans landed, the leaders of the ring had holed up at the Sana.

At Sezille's suggestion, Kerrigan goes to the Sana, ostensibly to inquire about Albert's sweetheart, MARGUERITE BREBOEUF. Nordstrom introduces his assistant, DR. CHARPIAT, and Marguerite is called in. All seems to be in order until Kerrigan asks after Leonard. Then Marguerite becomes hysterical. She had thought Leonard was back at the farm. She accuses the Sana's director of murdering her lover. Nordstrom strikes her and Charpiat blackjacks Kerrigan. . .

Kerrigan regains consciousness to find himself a prisoner in a private wing of the sanatorium. In the days that follow, Charpiat is revealed as a brutal sadist who delights in beating the American. Closely guarded in a cell-like room, escape seems hopeless to Kerrigan. LT. BARTHELEMY of the local gendarmerie is sent to the Sana by Sezille to investigate Kerrigan's welfare. But the prisoner has been warned that one false move will bring instant death. The gendarme departs, apparently satisfied. Desperate, Kerrigan formulates a plan. One night, having learned the schedule of rounds, he waits for the guard to enter his room, strangles him, takes his gun, and makes his way to the orderly room. There he waits for ADRIEN JOUGY, identified on the schedule as the watchman for that night. . . .

PART IV

IT WAS five minutes after midnight that Bruce heard the faint footsteps ascending the stairway. He had not dared close the window, and did not want to be spotted as an impostor soon enough for the other to react violently. He hunched in a chair, arms on the table, head on his arms. Adrien Jougy might be alert and spot the difference at once. But chances were that a white-coated man slumped in the chair would mean Jean to him. It did.

"Eh, wake up!" The man did not speak loudly. "Wake up—if Charpiat had pulled one of his sneaks, you'd be in for it!" He waited a second, touched Bruce on the shoulder. "Go on, scram and hit the hay."

Bruce turned and placed the revolver against his stomach. He did not have to speak, the man understood quickly, looking from the gun to the unfamiliar face. He stepped back and lifted his hands.

"Don't shoot."

"Turn around and back up a step—I'm not kidding."

"Who says you are?"

Bruce took the automatic pistol from the man's holster. It was a German .38, service model, long-barrel.

"Don't move yet."

"I'm not crazy, old man."

Bruce laid the old revolver on his lap, cocked the automatic, made sure it was loaded. The relic vanished in his pocket. He rose and tapped the other's pockets, found a small torch, handcuffs and a blackjack.

"I've seen you somewhere, pal," the guard said.

"All right, turn around and let me look at you. Easy."

"Easy, pal."

Adrien turned around. Bruce then recognized him as the man who had spoken to him and Doctor Sezille the night they had motored to the fence. He now wore long, loose trousers, a sort of light canvas jacket, soft-soled sandals. Bruce had missed the breast pocket. He found a notebook and a ring with several keys on it, one the room-key, the others larger.

"What are these for, Jougy?"

"Downstairs door, my room, the back gates. I know you, you came up with another guy in a car, guy said he was a doctor—" Bruce was about to proceed when he continued: "I thought the big shots acted kind of funny. But you took over quietly. I never heard a thing." He laughed, a gentle, silent laugh. "I'd like to have seen the Gorilla's mug—I suppose

you'll nab the gang down below at dawn, eh? You can boast you have a good smeller and lots of luck, I think the whole gang was getting ready to scram. The men went about it quiet-like, but you know dames, they were getting cartons and hat boxes.

"Personally, pal, I don't stand to get more than three years. I was employed here and I can claim good faith. Maybe I can get away clean. Look, I'm taking it quiet, can I get myself a drink?" When Bruce nodded, he opened the locker and took a bottle of wine, from which he drank.

"Put it down quiet and easy, Jougy."

"No fear. I was getting sick of it, anyway." Adrien Jougy sighed. "Mind if I sit down? It's sort of got my legs. I knew we were in for it when we got tough on the kids. I tried to tell Charpiat that, but he wouldn't listen—wanted to turn the dogs loose after the one that got away. They're fierce as wolves."

Jougy was very calm now. Bruce realized that he must have been nervous a long, long time, that he had feared the police, and now believed that his fears had materialized and that he was confronted by a detective. He had known nothing of Bruce's arrival at the sanatorium. Discretion and secrecy sometimes can work against their purpose.

"What about the other one, Jougy?"

"The tall one, the first one? Yes, I know about him. He'd managed to come in here, over the pike-fence, maybe, once before, to see a dame he was crazy about. And he'd got away. But you know, in a place like this, somebody sees everything. Some dame squealed on the girl to Nordstrom. At first, we couldn't believe the guy had got in—but I guess it's like cats, you can't stop them. Nordstrom himself questioned the girl, kind-like, and he got an admission from her.

"Leonard—he was a chauffeur here—was engaged to her, so Nordstrom sweated him, too. So we laid a trap for him, and Charpiat, Vannois and myself, we jumped him on the third terrace. He was strong as a bull, and fought like the devil. Then Charpiat hit him, and we carried him to a room in this ward. I used to see him through the peep-hole, when I was on duty, for maybe ten, twelve days. Then one night, the room was empty."

"Do you think they killed him?"

"Well, if he was alive, where else would they keep him, on the quiet? The basement's no good, because they have the hydraulics down there, and there's no bars in the attic windows." Adrien Jougy nodded toward the cigarettes on the table. "A gasper? Thanks—look, between you and me, that crazy guy, Charpiat, did him in. He used to go in there once or twice a day. The day guard told me he went in the first few times.

"Something's screwy about Charpiat. He likes to hit people—when a guy gets cell for some infraction, he is the one gives him the blows. They don't bother us guards, they fine us heavily. But some of the others, even the dames. But the pay's good and they hate to kick. But watch what comes out in court, now that they're not afraid for their jobs or for themselves!"

BRUCE'S hair was bristling as he listened. "Where do you think they buried the boy?"

"In the cemetery, of course. We've got one, all legal. I hear that at one time they even had a priest here, but that was years back. Now there's one comes once in a while, to hear confessions and say mass. Then there's a minister, I hear he comes all the way from Montbeliard." Jougy concluded with a note of pride: "Oh, it's well organized."

"You think they'd bury the boy in the cemetery?"

"Safest place. You know, the funerals in a place like this are quiet. If the family asks for religious rites, it's done, but on the sly. The other patients are not told; in fact, they're kept out of the way. So, the attendants would see nothing queer about burying anybody. Just another job."

"But the death certificate, the—"

"You cops are all alike—law, law, law! Why, if they kill a guy, why wouldn't they bury him without permission? Who's going to know?" Jougy shrugged. "But I didn't kill him. I arrested him—he was a prowler, I was hired as a guard, I did my job. Most of us guards don't like it, but what are we going to do? Kick good jobs in the face? Where in hell would we get it this soft again? Beat it and go to the cops? How do we know what's legal and what isn't? You ought to see the big shots

Nordstrom has to dinner when he gives parties. Guys with red ribbons across their dress shirts and crosses hanging round their necks."

"What about the Boches?" Bruce asked.

"What Boches?" Jougy wondered, with a grin and a wink.

Bruce asked more questions, to which the other replied willingly. He was obviously convinced that Bruce had been placed here to watch the ward until morning. He believed, through long habit, that even the police would follow the sanatorium's routine. At twelve forty-five, Bruce felt it was time to break off. He had to get away, and he couldn't leave Jougy behind.

"Look, you're taking it easy and all that," he said, "but I can't leave you here unwatched if I have to answer the bell. Suppose I put you in one of the rooms—" he consulted the chart—"an empty one, say Number Eight? I'll just put the cuffs on you. And I'll tip the others off you're a right guy and ready to talk."

"All right—" Jougy offered his wrists.

He preceded Bruce down the corridor, they entered the room. The American switched on the light. Even with handcuffs, he could not leave the man like this. A round by the doctor in charge—or by the super—and Jougy would be seen through the peep-hole, taken out and questioned.

He swung with the pistol, smacked the barrel against Jougy's skull, knocking him out. He caught him, eased him to the floor. He unlocked the cuffs, rolled him face down, locked the cuffs again behind his back. He bent back the legs, used strips of a sheet to bind them together, took one turn around the cuffs to ease pressure on the loop he threw around the neck. He stuffed the man's handkerchief into his mouth, knotted another strip of cloth around the head; then dragged the guard into a corner invisible from the door.

"That should do."

He switched off the light, closed the door. That was that.

If Adrien Jougy struggled too hard before his head cleared enough for him to understand his situation, he might well strangle himself. But Bruce did not worry over much about that—the man had something coming to him. He was not the gentle creature he pictured himself. All these guys had such splendid, logical explanations to offer. . .

He sat down in the orderly's room, an eye on the clock. The notebook found on Jougy gave him a clue as to the outside patrols. There were but two rounds during the night because of the long distance to be covered. One patrol from seven to midnight, one from midnight until five. Bruce figured that two guards were on day duty, therefore asleep now. That left six for night duty. Two patrolled between the buildings and the fence, with a dog. One must be in the superintendent's fence gate and one at the buildings' gate. That left one—Jougy, who had been taken care of. Ordinary attendants or nurses probably took care of the ordinary wards.

CHAPTER XV

ESCAPE!

AT ONE o'clock, acting on the written instructions on the chart, he pushed the super's bell twice. He had at least an hour ahead of him. In fact, he had much longer—the guard in the office would give the one up here time to report, might well wait another full hour before thinking something was wrong and disturbing himself to investigate. And it would take some time to locate Jougy in that room.

He regretted not having taken Jougry's jacket and cap, the white coat would be conspicuous. He took it off, replaced it with a dark sweater in a closet. He started down the stairs, pistol held under his arm—if anyone spotted him from a distance, the sight of the gun might arouse suspicion. There was a door to the outside in the hall below. He did not need to use the key. He stepped out into the open, stood under the stars, with a feeling of freedom that paid him for a good many bad hours. He was a fortunate man—he was alive, he was sound, he was free, and he had a gun—better, he had two guns!

He thought of Charpiat, and his outlook had so altered that if he had known exactly where to find the doctor he would have called on him. But, having escaped, he had responsibilities—information for Sezille, enough to make a direct accusation about the missing Albert. Jougy, when rescued and informed of the true situa-

tion, would not boast of having squealed, so he would be alive and available for questioning.

He got his bearings easily enough—moving about at night was not precisely new for him, and he had not forgotten much. Only one obstacle between him and complete safety, the two-man patrol and the dog. He probably would not meet them—and if he hid, it would be too bad—he might not be a match in plotting for Nordstrom or Sezille, but when it came to quick shooting he was not bad, not bad. If they surprised him, he would throw down the big gun—and surprise them with the little one when the chance came.

He descended the short flights of stairs, walking carefully by the light of the stars. He turned to look over his shoulder—only two or three pin-points of light at the buildings. He was glad that the dogs were kept near the main-gate. He could smell the flowers, the damp earth. He reached one of the gates in the high railing, un-

He bent back the legs, using strips of a sheet to bind them together.

locked it at the second try. Lock and hinges were oiled, there was no sound. He locked the gate behind him—an open gate causes suspicion.

His sneakers made slight sounds on the gravel path, he walked on the grass border. He had, sometime, to turn left. This trail led down to the bungalows. He peered for the cross-path, to swing away from them. Then he would have to go back up hill to a ridge, then down hill to the fence, down hill to the valley.

Then he was conscious that he was not quite alone. He had seen nothing, heard nothing. It was not ordinary perception, it was instinct, as if he felt a presence against his skin. He walked faster, faster—then he stopped suddenly, on the alert. Nothing, nothing—except that sensation of physical nearness, of someone nearby thinking dangerous thoughts. This became so strong that he shied away from bushes, from the thicker darkness under the trees, tried to keep to the middle of the path.

"I'm crazy," he thought. "I'd hear something."

He left the path, glided into shadow, pressed his back against the trunk of a tree. The gun-grip was moist in his palm, his heart pounded. He waited two, three, four minutes. If there was anyone around, they would lose patience, move. They could not see any better than he could.

When he at length decided his imagination had tricked him, he relaxed and headed for the gravel path. Then the gun was twisted from his hand, incredibly hard and strong fingers closed on his windpipe. Bruce struggled, but he was fighting some sort of enormous, bony brute seemingly immune to pain, for the punches in his ribs and belly did not make him let go.

Sparks and whirling spirals of fire danced in his eyeballs. He managed to slide two fingers inside the other's thumb and get some air. Then they fell, the attacker on top, right knee on Bruce's chest. There was a panting pause. The other man gasped like a horse neighing.

Bruce's hand went to his pocket, closed around the little gun. The man holding him guessed what he was doing, shifted his left knee to bear on Bruce's right arm. But the revolver was out. Bruce tried to bend his wrist far enough to shoot at the other, but the knee slid down and held the elbow joint. "You swine—you—make a—noise—you shoot—I'll shove on this——"

This was the point of a knife below Bruce's left ear. Yes, a mere reflex would be enough to drive the blade in and slice his throat. He could probably shoot now, and wound the guy—but at a big price. He was able to breathe, and for long seconds they were still, locked, panting. Bruce started to think again: This man did not want to give the alarm, and in fact, neither did he—they could be on the same side. . .

"Let—go that—knife. Let go—one—two—"

"Not—knife—" Bruce contrived to whisper hoarsely. "Revolver—revolver—Bejart—"

He relaxed completely, save for that life-saving hold on that steely thumb. The man held on for two seconds longer, as if he didn't trust his ears. Then he laughed, shifted his knees carefully, rose.

"Where the devil have you been?"

"Having fun, getting beaten up and choked." Bruce massaged his sore throat. "Also, I killed a guy, maybe two."

"Good work. Feel all right? Let's get out of this."

"Suits me."

THEY set off at Bejart's loping gait. Bruce felt safer now—anyway, he wouldn't be clubbed to death in a room. He found time to wonder at this man's energy—Bejart must be twice his age and a few years more, but he was still a match for most men. Of course, he had had the advantage of surprise and of long, long experience.

"What were you doing there, Bejart?"

"He asks! What do you think? You can brag about worrying a lot of people for the past two, three days. I was around last night, and the night before, trying to find out what had happened to you, where you were locked up. I had to be careful, the *Toubib* was afraid they'd croak you at the first sign of trouble.

"He's had guys watching the roads, in case they make a break for Switzerland. He's been wiggling about like an imp in a font—and getting things started. He's got Choris back on the right side, thanks to Barthelemy—"

"That stupid cop?"

"Not so dumb. Sezille took him to see

The gun was twisted from his hand—incredibly hard and strong fingers closed on his windpipe.

Choris, and Barthelemy said that legally he had to accept your signed statement and file it with his report, but that he wasn't satisfied with the way things looked. He said everything looked all right, that he found you playing chess, but that a doctor there kept his eye on him and on you all the time, and seemed either crazy or looking for trouble."

Bruce addressed a mental apology to the stupid gendarme, who might not know chess but could read a human face so much better than he could. Charpiat had not deceived the gendarme.

"I found out about Albert," he offered.

"Dead? Poor slob. How about the dame?"

"Alive yesterday. Saw her."

They had swung up hill, crossed the ridge. This was the same slope on which they had fled after Brenay had taken the photo. In less than an hour, they would be at the barb-wire fence. In a low voice, Bruce related his adventures to Bejart, who clucked his tongue incredulously at the scene with Marguerite, at the beatings.

"What do you know!"

"Halt! Don't move!"

The beam of a big torch blinded them. The lens glared at them, thirty or forty feet away. Bejart swore under his breath as he lifted his hands. Bruce naturally did the same.

"Drop your guns. Go on, drop them! There are two automatic carbines on you."

Bejart and Bruce obeyed. The blinding disk moved nearer. Then Bruce went down—Bejart had tripped him as he plunged for his pistol. The American found his weapon at the same time—while the two guns opened fire. Bejart shot without rising, prone in the beam of light. The tommy-guns fired too high, because of the declivity. Bruce was to one side of the light, aimed, fired. There was a metallic impact, the light vanished.

Bruce felt a pull at his left arm, obeyed, running as fast as he could. That old guy ran on those old legs as if he were split to the breastbone!

After crashing through bushes, Bejart pushed Bruce down in a hollow. He punched his knuckles angrily into the American's side, whispered fiercely, "You could have saved the gab for later." Some distance away, a torch blinked out, vanished. "What do you want to do, get us killed?"

Then there was silence for a while. Bruce rose to his knees to peer through the bushes, pistol poised. For the second time that night, something hurtled out of the darkness upon him, he felt a crunching grip on his arm below the elbow. His free hand, swinging instinctively, sank in thick, smooth hair. It was the dog—it had knocked him down sideways. He held onto the arm and clawed with his paws. Bruce pinched his nostrils hard. There was a scramble, a crackling of twigs and whipping leafage.

"Get him off, Bejart—"

"Coming."

The animal gurgled, warm liquid fell on Bruce's thigh, then the teeth loosened. Bejart jerked him erect, they ran off again. Fifty long strides farther, the poacher squatted in another clump of bush. .

"Halt! Don't move!" The beam of a big torch blinded them.

"Steady, youngster. We can get them this time."

The beam of the torch leaped forward again. Bejart fired twice. The torch rolled on the ground, and something dark moved before it. The old woodsman fired again, and again.

"Lousy bastards, sending a good dog to do their job for them."

"They killed my dog," a guard screamed. He turned loose with his carbine, wildly, the spurts of flame darting in the wrong direction. Bruce fired this time, gauging the distance from the flames. The shooting stopped.

Bejart rested his hand on Bruce's shoulder, held him down for several minutes. Then he tapped him, the signal to be off. They slid step by step for some distance, then trotted. The poacher slowed down to a walk just as the younger man felt he would falter.

"They're back there, they didn't follow."

"Think we killed them?"

"Hope so. We didn't do them any good, anyway. Look, that torch is still burning." It was. That seemed a good indication that neither man had been able to pick it up. "Sorry I bawled you out about talking, youngster. I was just as much to blame for listening. I knew the patrol was somewhere around here at this time, but finding you threw me off. Too bad about the dog—first time I killed one, and I hope it's the last."

"My arm feels very sore. Do you think—"

"Rabies?" Bejart chuckled. "Not a chance. Those dogs are well-kept, fed as carefully as you and me, isolated. Where would they catch it? Sure, your arm's sore, it would be if you'd squeezed it that hard in a vise. Say, darkness and all, he did his job, eh? If I hadn't been around, he'd have shaken that gun loose and gone for your throat."

"Yes, I thought of that."

"Nothing better than a good dog. Reload, now."

"What with? I haven't any clips."

"Check up on what you've got left—best to know."

"Should have eight left, fired three times," Bruce said. He checked. "And one in the chamber—five."

"See? You figure eight, you've got five—you're muddled."

"I'm bleeding, by the way."

"Best thing that could happen, carries away infection. Can you trot for a while? Come on."

THE two joined Doctor Sezille in a road-tender's shack some eighteen hundred meters from the wire fence. The Frenchman was not effusive, but Bruce was touched by his expression of relief and joy. Bejart was sent off at once, to spread the news that the American had been found, alive and in reasonably good shape.

The doctor treated Bruce's arm by the light of a storm-lantern suspended from the low ceiling. Two men were snoring on the floor, near the wall, another pair were on the cot. There were guns, equipment, helmets, propped and hung everywhere.

"Looks quite like old times," Bruce remarked.

"We've got a hundred men around here. When we find the dog, I'll send his head to the lab at the hospital. I haven't any serum with me. I knew there were dogs, should have thought of it." He shook his head when Bejart's statement was quoted. "I'm no sorcerer, just a school doctor, so I play it safe. Now—"

"Just a minute. How long does it take for a brain injury to show?"

"Suppose you tell me all about it?" Seville listened. "I don't know any more than you do whether it will ever bother you. You'll probably be all right. Worrying won't help. I've met Charpiat and I thought him a bit peculiar. But I thought it was just a matter of ambiance. Reflecting his patients—you know, the way men who do business with women get, a dressmaker, a hairdresser, a decorator, they gab and gesture like women and it doesn't mean a thing, usually. But from what you tell me, he's definitely a *refoulé*."

"And what's that, in plain French?"

"Rebels against his subconscious. So he beats you."

"That makes it all right, of course." Bruce had a drink, a couple of sandwiches as he told his story for the second time. "So I'm guilty of homicide," he concluded.

"I wouldn't worry about it," Sezille said. "There'll be such a mess around here, it won't even be noticed. I've been tearing things apart. That business about Albert and the girl will help a lot. I nearly went

nuts when Barthelemy, the cop, came back to Aurebois with your signed statement. Legally, he could do nothing more, but he came with me to see Choris. I put the case right up to him—he can get right to people it would take me a week to see. I told him that if anything happened to you, I'd turn the whole story over to the newspapers and fling the responsibility on his uncle—it was his uncle he saw—and risk a sentence for defamation.

"Well, Choris wasn't exactly crazy to help us again, but my little blackmail worked. He did a lot of long-distance phoning. I found a nice little gadget that worked wonders: I said that if the Procurator at Aurebois refused to move, I'd go into another district and get help there—it can be done when local authorities are slack, and when the crime involves the forging of official documents. Passports and cards are documents, and the people at the Sana have false entries. That's article 464.

"Well, by the next morning, I had achieved this: the Procurator had ducked the issue, vanished on a sudden vacation, and his substitute said that while he could not issue definite orders, he considered the case an emergency and would not oppose action if ordinary caution was observed.

"I'd planned going up myself with a truckload of gendarmes, but the captain turned me down flat. He wanted written orders. I tried to get them and couldn't. So, late in the afternoon, I had the cops call the Sana and ask for you to be brought to the phone, to make sure you were all right. Nothing doing, they said that there was a rule against patients being disturbed and that you had signed for treatments. I knew then you were in a bad jam. Bejart had prowled around, but couldn't get in.

"I couldn't locate anybody in the Procurator's office, the substitute had taken a powder. The word had spread that something serious was about to break, and quite a few people left by train or auto. I checked with the telephone central, and several calls had gone through to Nordstrom, so I knew he was warned. I sent out a call for volunteers, old members of the Resistance, ex-members of the F.F.I.—they're not always one and the same—and a bunch of ex-prisoners of war. I told them not to worry about consequences but to stop any car passing by Forlagne from the Sana. The cops closed their eyes.

"But Sana people must have got wise, because some of our guys camped pretty close to the gate."

Bruce nodded. "That's why Jougy thought I was a cop."

"Very likely. Operators listen on the phone, too, and the word probably spread quickly. Today—yesterday, rather—I couldn't hold on any longer. I'd sent you in there, you see. So I came up here myself. And did things for which I'll get thirty years in Guiana, or wherever, if matters don't go just right."

"What did you do?"

"I took over the village of Forlagne. I am at this minute a dictator." Sezille grinned nervously. "Like Bonaparte! I kidnapped the mayor, two councilmen, and have them under guard. I have men at the post office, controlling telegraph and telephone. And I have the two gendarmes bluffed through the mayor. You see, in the absence of a police commissioner in a community, the mayor or his substitute can call on the gendarmes to intervene when there is a flagrant breach of the peace. Decree of May 20, 1903, see articles 125, 138 and so forth. . .

"Flutet and Macard are pretty nervous, those good gendarmes, but they know their responsibility is covered. We have them with us. I have persuaded the mayor and his aides that there is a case of emergency and 'public clamor' as foreseen, and they have requested the gendarmes to investigate a flagrant breach at the Sana. We can move up at four o'clock, in less than an hour from now, as daylight at this season starts legally at that time. The guards are pretty jittery, and I hope that something will happen to bring Article 310, same decree, into operation—if the gendarmes are attacked in carrying out their mission, they may require assistance from ordinary citizens. Which will cover my men.

"All of this, I realize, is rather like using a trip-hammer to crack a peanut, but what else can we do, old man? There is a law in the land and we must observe it."

"They shot at me," Bruce declared.

"You don't count. And you were technically trespassing, so we better shut up about that. If you did get those two guys, we'll blame the cops, who can't be

bothered, and pass them to profit and loss."

"That's nice."

"Now, you go down to the Matignons' farm and wait."

"You don't say! Why?"

"Because if there is a kick-back, a serious mess, and you're any further in it, your Government will let you stew in your own juice. They can't interfere if you break French laws."

"Fine time to think of it. I'm going up there with you. I have an appointment of sorts, don't forget."

"I'm not forgetting. That's what I'm afraid of."

"I'll take my chances. How's the mayor taking it?"

"Very badly. He says he'll have my hide." Sezille started to laugh. "Matignon's one of the councilmen we got. I got even with him for the other night. He saw the climate had changed, that those guys with guns didn't give a damn what they did—they're crazy to get at the Boches up there—and that it wasn't a matter of a burnt thumb, but of his life. He deflated like a pricked balloon." He glanced at his watch. "H hour minus five—let's go."

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRING SQUAD

SEZILLE left the shack, stood by the roadside. He lifted a whistle to his lips, modulated long notes. Gendarmes Flutet and Macard apeared very soon, on their bikes. They looked pale and nervous.

"All right, my boys," Sezille told them, "you roll up to the gate. You demand admittance in the name of the Republic, or whatever you use now, and of the mayor of Forlagne to investigate a disturbance, including gunshots. The man will ask you to wait until he gets word to the Château. You refuse and go in. If you meet resistance, deal with it. You're covered by the mayor."

They were very unhappy gendarmes, that was plain. They did not argue. Flutet even sketched a vague military salute. They pedaled slowly up the road.

Sezille and Bruce had been joined by the four men from the shack, who yawned and rubbed their eyes. Other men came straggling out of the mist. Most of them wore berets, a few wore steel helmets of various origins, French and American predominating. True sunrise was still somewhat more than an hour away, but somewhere behind the remote Alps, day had started and a dim, slanting light oozed through the haze, caught on polished metal surfaces. Everywhere in the groups cigarette tips glowed like jewels.

"We're waiting for a signal," Sezille said. "If we pass the fence now, it's breaking in."

"Suppose the guard doesn't resist?" Bruce asked.

"Oh, someone will shoot at the gendarmes. Who'll know who, afterward? Come on, we might as well get nearer."

The detachment followed him as he cut across the sloping pastures, toward the barb-wire fence. All these men had been soldiers at one time or another, and automatically moved in orderly files.

"How many have we got here?" Bruce wondered.

"Forty-four. Why?"

"How about detaching a few to go around the back of the buildings? I have the keys to the rail-fence and back door. They probably can beat the gendarmes and their assistants to the Château, enter by surprise, nab an attendant or a nurse to pilot them. They can find Marguerite Breboeuf, who may be in danger—if she's not dead. Also, my pal Jougy, a good witness if he didn't strangle or suffocate."

"Good idea," the young doctor approved, "but you'll hear some beefing. These guys and another lot of twenty-four that's going through the fence maybe a kilometer from here to cut off the bungalows from the rear, have all been picked to handle the Boches. Choice established by seniority in prison camps. You'll lead the bunch?"

"No. I want to see what happens at the bungalows."

"See? Oh, well." Sezille waited until the detachment stood before the wire fence, then asked for six volunteers. When he explained, no one moved. "Come, lads, this isn't a picnic, what must be done must be done. Stand where you are—every seventh man falls out—that's fairest." He counted, and the men indicated fell out. They didn't look pleased. "Now, you're—"

Crack!

A detonation had lashed into the morning silence a few hundred yards away. The gendarmes had been fired upon, and now private citizens were duty-bound to give them all assistance. Sezille did not have time to utter the order, the men rushed against the fence, chopped two uprights, cut the spiny strands with appropriate tools. Fifteen seconds from the shot, the whole lot was pouring into private property.

"At the double!" Sezille called. "Fan out, there may be shooting—"

The men maneuvered like a regular infantry section, perhaps better than most sections. They deployed across the slope.

Bruce was as excited and elated as the others, at first. Then he started to feel the accumulated fatigue of the past hours. He had not slept at all during the night, he had been bruised and lacerated in two encounters. The lively ache in his swelling arm made him forget the faint throbbing at the base of the skull. He kept up with Sezille, who ordered the pace, trot and walk, trot and walk. The sun was coming up, the east was a fusion of liquid gold and azure.

"A stiff, chief—"

Sezille and Bruce headed toward the gesticulating man. Yes, there was a dead man, lying face up in the grass.

One of the partisans stooped, picked up an electric torch—the bulb was glowing faintly. This was the man shot by Bejart. Bruce ran down, found the body of the dog. There was no trace of the man he had shot—or fired upon, at least.

He rejoined the advancing detachment. Four hundred yards farther, along another hail came: Bruce had not missed. The second guard had stopped to bandage his wounds and had passed out from shock and loss of blood. He was still breathing.

"He'll do for a while," Sezille muttered.

A short distance beyond, Bruce gave the keys and instructions to the bunch headed for the rear of the Sana. Then the detachment reached the dividing ridge, trotted through the firs and emerged in sight of the bungalows. Almost instantly, there was a whine overhead, the crack of a military rifle. The advancing line went down in a graceful genuflection.

"They'll fight," Sezille remarked. "I like that better."

The range was still too far for automatic weapons to be efficient. The men armed with rifles opened fire. Those shots seemed to have touched off the powder keg, for in the lulls in the crackling, Bruce heard the rattle of tommy-guns from several directions.

THE partisans dribbled forward in short runs, in alternating groups. There seemed to be only three rifles in play on the opposite side. Bruce had time to watch, to note, for his pistol was useless at long distance. In a way, he pitied the poor slobs in those ramshackle structures—rifle bullets drilled through the walls, they were outnumbered, out-gunned and softened by two years of easy living. Hares at bay!

The attackers closed in, five yards at a time, dodging from tree to brush, from bush to tree. The automatic guns opened up, knocked holes in the wooden walls. Groups rushed into the first buildings. The sunlight flooded stronger, shot long shadows that magnified, caricatured the darting silhouettes.

Bruce, who had stood up to watch, ducked as a bullet passed inches from his head. Sezille dodged also. There was an impact, as of a breaking stick, and a man dropped, howling, from a shattered shinbone.

"He's in the basin, he's in the basin—"

There was a circular basin or pool on the main lawn of the rustic garden, with a jet of water in the center. The cement rim jutted eighteen inches. The sniper was lying in water, sprayed by the mobile jet. A dozen automatics centered on the spot, the stone and cement chipped, the central jet went crazy as it smashed and whirled thin spray horizontally.

"It's a dame!" yelled one of the nearest men.

"Yes, it's a dame!" she screamed back. "*Bande de vaches*—and better than your mothers, you bunch of cows! You call yourselves Frenchmen, massacring women—"

"Don't make us cry," jeered the man.

The woman shifted her rifle to bear on him, exposed her head. A gun cracked.

"It's all over," Sezille said, a minute later. The men of the flanking detachment were emerging from the other side of the kiosk, driving the prisoners before

them, a man and two women. The search of the bungalows produced five men and three women. There were four bodies laid on a lawn, those of three men and the corpse of the woman sniper fished out of the little pool. The entire dinner party was accounted for.

The survivors were pushed against the brick and cement base of the pavilion. They held their hands up and appeared more stunned than terror-struck. The attack had not been wholly unexpected, for the searchers had found trunks and bags locked and ready to leave. All were completely dressed, despite the early hour, except de Cossel, the boulevardier, who wore a long purple robe over mauve pajamas. Between his slippered feet was a big leather satchel.

"The shorter the better for everybody," Sezille announced. "A man will pass a pad and pencil. If you like, you can write down your real names, address of next of kin, and a short message."

Only one person broke down, a woman, who fell on her knees and wailed shrilly. Another woman clasped her around the shoulders, talked to her. Bruce looked for the stout man who had been a Gestapo officer. He was among the killed. For the rest, there was no hope of escape, no hope of pity. Even the doomed people realized that, a look at the faces of the armed men facing them was enough. But the few seconds needed to scribble a few words were so many more seconds of life.

. . . There was a dead man lying face up in the grass.

Only one man did not avail himself of the chance.

"Are you in charge, Doctor Sezille?"

"I am, *Monsieur le Comte,* at your service."

"Will you favor me with a private talk?"

"Talk away, we're among friends."

"I call upon you to discharge your duty and turn me over to the National Police. I have a five years' sentence."

"I remit it gladly," Sezille informed him.

"I have papers of extreme importance in this satchel. I demand to be taken at once before the—"

"Oh, come, Monsieur, you are the one Frenchman in the lot—don't make us all ashamed for you."

"But, do you understand you are responsible? You cannot—"

"It's much to late to pray to a man. I'd suggest addressing God."

Brenay was circulating busily with his camera. Three men, evidently designated in advance, stepped forward, came to a halt facing the huddled prisoners. They stood four feet apart, each one holding an automatic gun. Two guns were British Stens, the third a German issue. Sezille ignored the count who still begged and threatened in his shrill, cracking voice, but did not dare move or lower his hands. He nodded toward the three.

"We had quite an argument about this, these chaps won out. All three faced German firing-squads. Two were reprieved at the last instant. The third, the little fellow in the center, was actually shot and thrown into a common grave. Fantastic days, fantastic chaps, eh?" Sezille took the papers on which the prisoners had written, folded them. "I can use these before sending them on. Things are looking up for us."

"Doctor Sezille, my death will not be ignored! I have friends in Paris. This is assassination—"

"You'll have a stroke, you know!"

The pale-faced runt in the center looked toward his chief with impatience. "Now?"

Sezille nodded and turned his back.

The automatics were lifted. At the last moment, two of the women and the old nobleman tried to run. The guns tapped out in unison. The moving prisoners

tumbled to the ground, the motionless were knocked back against the chipping bricks, slithered slowly to the ground.

There was an interval of silence. No one moved. Then, near the wall, a leg lifted, a hand moved. There was the click of fresh magazines being inserted, the guns hammered away again. The din kept up for ten seconds.

All around, men relaxed, cigarettes and pipes were produced. Partisans strolled forward in groups, looked down at the bodies. One or two had known the women.

"What do we do now, chief?"

"We join the others. Just a minute—" Sezille went to pick up the satchel. He took it over to one of the log benches, could not open the lock, borrowed a knife to cut it open. There were bundles of papers, several ledgers. The doctor turned to Bruce, who looked on curiously. "Careful old codger, that chap! Figured this was his insurance. Turned out to be ours. Odd world, what?"

He handed the bag to one of the men. "Watch it." Then he blew his whistle. "Leave everything as it is. Direction, the Château."

Two more shots sounded. The pale man run up to rejoin.

"I made sure, chief," he explained. "You never can tell—I ought to know."

CHAPTER XVII

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

THERE were few signs of violence at the Château. A few splinters of glass from a broken window at the keeper's lodge near the main gate, wet spots on recently flushed pavement. Carmelin, who had

The partisans dribbled forward in short runs, in alternating groups — closing in on the Chateau.

been in charge unofficially, greeted Sezille and Bruce at the top of the monumental stoop. He still held his Sten gun in the crook of his arm.

"How did it go, *Toubib*?"

"Clean sweep. One wounded on our side. You?"

"Gendarme Flutet caught one in the arm." Carmelin shook his head at the doctor's ironic glance. "On the level. The gate-keeper did it, not a guard. Not much cold meat, three dead." The big mechanic shrugged. "They gave in like lambs. I pinched Nordstorm and the tall guy, and left the others free to run the dump under supervision, as you ordered. Had the patients kept to their rooms."

"Marguerite Breboeuf?"

"She's alive. The guys you sent were in her room when Charpiat ran in. That's where he was arrested. Looks to me like she's been doped, though her chart reads she has some kind of fever, typhoid or something. I told Royer that we'd bump him if she kicked off before you had a chance at the case. I don't think he'll pull anything phony." He addressed Bruce. "We got Jougy and he'll be all right. And we found your stiff. That makes four." He grinned. "This is a swell place to work—they've got a refrigerated morgue and a peach of an organization. In five minutes, everything was out of sight. And guys were hosing down the pavement."

"Nordstrom?" Sezille asked.

"I've got him in the office, with Charpiat and everybody." Carmelin broke into a laugh. "There's an old steward here, name is Godolphin, no kidding. He said for me to keep the disturbance in what he calls the Administration Wing, because he didn't want the patients made nervous."

"He's quite right. Come on."

Bruce followed Sezille into the office, reentering it as a conqueror. Nordstorm was at his usual place, behind the big desk, in his swivel chair. But he was tied up. The mayor of Forlagne, Prosper Matignon, and another farmer sat together on a long leather settee. They looked frightened and surly. They glowered at the young doctor. Prosper greeted Bruce with a nod. Charpiat occupied a straight chair between the two gendarmes—he was handcuffed. Corporal Flutet had his arm in a sling and wore an expression of heroism.

Sezille caught Bruce by the arm as the American headed for Charpiat. "Not now. Get a chair." He ordered Carmelin to shove Nordstrom's chair against the wall behind, and took the central seat for himself. "We'll settle a few things before breakfast. Carmelin, tell the chap with the satchel to bring it in here. Gendarme Macard, will you take your superior to a room where he can rest? You're not needed now, Flutet, but I promise you that you'll get a promotion. Courage, initiative, wounded in the line of duty. Can't miss."

Then, when the two cops had left, he picked up the telephone: *"Allo, Allo?* Louis? No calls through either way, until I tell you. At seven—in thirty-five minutes—get through to the Prefecture—there'll be somebody there . . . What? . . . You'll hear all about it later—no one leaves here for a while." He hung up and spoke to Bruce with some impatience: "What do you want?"

"My passport, my papers, my stuff."

"Who attends to that, doctor?"

"The steward. Under the edge of the desk, second button."

The man brought in de Cossel's satchel, placed it on the side of the desk near Sezille's chair. The young doctor took out the papers, the ledgers, consulted them with close attention, selecting a document here and there. Godolphin, the steward, a dry, cool old man with gray side-whiskers, entered, took Bruce's name and room number. Sezille lighted a cigarette, and most of the others started to smoke.

"Carmelin, be kind enough to pass these few papers to the mayor and his friends. Gentlemen, no need to bother destroying them. Merely samples."

Nordstrom chuckled. "De Cossel is a methodical man."

"Was," Sezille corrected calmly. "Doctor, do not speak unless questioned. I don't like to be reminded of your presence."

There was a prolonged silence. The farmers were looking at the papers. They whispered excitedly. They shrugged. Godolphin returned, handed Bruce a pencil with the envelop. "Sign here—I keep the tab as a receipt."

BRUCE tore the envelope open with a tremendous sense of elation. He felt as if he were rising from the grave. He distributed his belongings in pockets already distended by loot, wound his watch, set it, fastened it.

"Doctor Nordstorm," Sezille spoke without turning, "you have important papers also. What do you wish done with them?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Where are they?"

"I don't remember."

"You have a safe concealed behind the painting over there—we better have the combination. What is it?"

"I don't remember."

"Doctor Charpiat?" Sezille lifted his glance.

"Yes, Doctor Sezille?"

"You know the combination. What is it?"

"I don't remember it, sorry."

"You must be." Sezille rummaged in a heap of objects piled beside the desk, picked up a short, black, shiny stick. "I have heard a good deal about this lately. I understand you killed young Legrain with it."

"You are mistaken. He died of lung collapse."

"He was not registered as a patient here, curious that you should know exactly how he died. However . . . Kerrigan—" Sezille half rose to hand over the baton to Bruce, "will you ask the gentleman for the combination?"

Bruce got a good grip on the club and headed for Charpiat.

"Right, forty-seven, left, seventeen, right, thirty-four—" Charpiat gave the information. "But the important papers aren't in the safe now. I am very sorry, Doctor Nordstorm, but it is every man for himself from now on. They're in the bottom drawer of the desk, left, in a sort of movable steel case. Ready to be picked up.

The key is among the others on that chain."

"Thank you. Kerrigan, you can—"

"Doctor Sezille," the mayor interrupted, rising suddenly.

"I know, you have a proposition to make. But I have arranged everything. Don't worry, keep in mind that I am grateful for your splendid collaboration. Nothing could have been achieved without it. Monsieur Kerrigan, I believe I promised you a few minutes in private with Doctor Charpiat. There is a dressing-room off the bath."

To his annoyance, Bruce felt hesitant and sheepish. He had told Sezille that what he wanted most in life was ten minutes alone with Charpiat. Carmelin led the tall Frenchman to the dressing-room. An uncurtained window of opaque glass let in a sinister light on the porcelain utensils on the tables, on the mirror set in an enormous clothes-press.

"Have a good time," Carmelin said with a chuckle. "I'll close the doors in case he howls. Sezille's jittery enough as is."

"Take the cuffs off."

"As you wish, pal. But it's dumb—you're not in good shape."

The mechanic left. Bruce realized that he had told the truth. His arm ached, his legs throbbed. His reflection in the mirror showed him in torn sweater and shirt, wide bloodstains on his trousers. But he had the baton, badge of authority. He saw that Charpiat was afraid. His fingers shook and he kept swallowing convulsively. Bruce remembered when he had smiled. This was the swine who had beaten a helpless kid day after day until he had collapsed and died. The same treatment had been in store for him, he knew. By touching his neck, certain spots on his spine, he could rekindle sharp pains.

Charpiat sat down on a chair, lifted his glance, with a ghastly, greasy smile. "It's justice. Strike."

Bruce remembered a blow in the abdomen. He had intended to strike the man in the belly. And there he was, and he, Bruce, stood before him with the short stick in his fist. He could not make up his mind. Evidently, cruelty was hard to achieve unless one had been born with it.

"Stand up."

Charpiat shook his head, smiling faintly. Bruce had longed for something resembling a fight, and he was frustrated. The stick waggled in his grip tentatively, and the physician closed his eyes. Bruce waited, he was tempted to toss aside the weapon and make it even, but if he were beaten he would seem ridiculous to Sezille, to Carmelin, for they would guess what he had done. And this man was tall, well-knit, fresh from sleep. Charpiat opened his eyes, looked up and smiled ingratiatingly. "Stand up!"

When the other refused, Bruce was goaded by that smile.

"You think I won't? That I am a sucker, eh?"

He brought the baton across that smiling face, once, twice, three times. Charpiat's head bobbed under the impacts. Blood oozed from his lacerated lips, from his nose. He quivered, moaned, sighed, mumbled indistinctly. But he did not rise, did not even raise his hands to wipe his chin.

Bruce flung the baton on the tiles. It bounced several times, like something alive.

"You'll be guillotined, you know that," he said, shakily. "That's why I can't—"

"No," Charpiat whispered. "You are gentle, kind. You can't hurt me." His voice had a slithering, caressing sweetness. "You are kind, so kind."

"I'll show you—you better get up—" Bruce picked up the baton. This slob thought he was a sucker, too weak to hold resentment three days, too mushy to avenge himself. Well, he would knock him cold in the same way, twice—no, three times. Give him a taste of what it felt like to sink into darkness, emerge and sink again.

"Get up, for the last time, get up—"

Then he lifted his arm and swung down. Charpiat uttered no sound, his chin settled on his breast. He was knocked out. Bruce leaned back against the wall, arms folded, watching him. He would let him come out of it, and tap him again. Just once more.

A MINUTE passed, another, four, five. Bruce propped the chin up with the stick. The mouth was open, the eyes closed. He turned on a tap, keeping an eye on Charpiat, filled a tumbler of water which he dashed into the man's face. There was

no movement. He waited another two minutes, then went to the office door.

"Doctor, could you come here a minute?"

"Ah—oh, well. If the phone rings, answer and hold the line, Carmelin." Sezille hurried in, closed the door. "You've done it?"

"I knocked him out and—and—"

"And he stays out, eh?" Sezille went to the man sprawled on the chair, took the head between his palms, moved it about. "Gone." He turned to wash his hands in the basin. "Nice layout here, isn't it? You know, I expected this to happen. What you didn't realize was that Charpiat, every time he tapped you on the neck, was performing a sort of trick, stunning you without killing you. Something like blowing out a flame without knocking over the candle. When he swung hard, he hit the skull, which in your case must be very solid. But when he hit you on the back of the neck, he tapped just right—and up a bit further than you did. Sort of a game for him."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why?" Sezille laughed. "You were squeamish enough as it was. And he is best out of the way."

"Why?"

"To avoid a trial. I promised someone that there would be no mess in courts if I was granted a free hand. Well, come on, or do you want to stay and hold his hand?" They met Carmelin at the door of the office; the doctor nodded. "It's done."

"I'll call in the help—you'll see how quick they get a stiff out of sight. They bring a stretcher, sheets, even a mop—"

"Hold on, we don't want them to make two trips." Sezille looked at his watch as he sat down, picked up the telephone. "*Allo, allo*—Louis? At his private domicile? It doesn't matter. Ring him. *Allo*, yes, miss, this is Doctor Sezille—" He covered the mouthpiece, smiled. "We breakfast after this. *Allo*, yes, myself, *Monsieur le Juge*.

"My apologies for disturbing you so early, but the occasion justifies it. I am telephoning from the Sana . . . Yes, the Nordstrom establishment above Forlagne —I hope you'll forgive me, but I've more or less taken charge . . . Yes, the mayor is here, and the gendarmerie. I shall wait right here and explain to the proper magistrate when you send him . . . No, you need not disturb yourself. What happened—I have made a few notes, to spare your time . . . You are very kind.

"Last night, I was at Forlagne attending a dinner—an informal gathering—former members of the Resistance, army veterans, ex-prisoners of war, hostages and so on . . . Yes, several were from Aurebois. We intend to have such dinners every three months—but to come to the point. An individual named Bejart, vaguely healer, vaguely poacher, a local character, you understand . . . Ah, you know of him? Well, he came to join us very late, and he was excited. He explained that he had been in the vicinity of the sanatorium . . . Please? Oh, that's very good, *Monsieur le Juge*—picking sunflowers in the dark of the moon—aha—well, he had heard shots and screams. He was certain that some sort of violence was going on. As you may know, there have been rumors circulating about the sanatorium of late—

"The mayor was our guest of honor. He tried to telephone the Gendarmerie at Aurebois, but could not get a connection . . . Yes, it is odd—the more so as the line seems to be in excellent order this morning . . . Please? You are absolutely right, we do not understand all the mysteries of electricity as yet!

"The two local gendarmes were called by the mayor. The corporal—Flutet— is an intelligent man. He would not exceed his prerogatives and go at once, because it was night, but he suggested that we move up nearer to be ready to start a serious investigation as soon as daylight came. Of course, most of the veterans have arms that they keep as souvenirs . . . I agree with you, it would be silly to be punctilious about their not having turned them in—and we were all willing when Corporal Flutet, authorized by the mayor, requisitioned us to help.

"It was well that he did so, *Monsieur le Juge*. He was greeted with pistol shots, and wounded . . . No, luckily it's not serious. It seemed to us that we had broken right into the middle of a private war between some people of indefinite origin, refugees or displaced persons, living in the old German barracks in the park, and the establishment's guards. Guns shooting all over the place, and when we appeared, both sides opened fire on *us*.

"Naturally, we fired back. There was some sort of trouble also at the main building. Your magistrate will doubtless elucidate all details. So far, they escape me for a large part . . . Dead? Oh, yes—I should say about twenty dead . . . I know it is ghastly, and I regret being the one to inform you, *Monsieur le Juge.* At one spot, it appears as if a regular massacre had taken place . . .

"No, it is impossible for any newspaper to have been notified . . . No, no, you need not concern yourself at all, *Monsieur le Juge.* Vested with authority by the mayor, my first thought was to inform post and telegraph employees not to put through any calls except official communications. As soon as we are through, you can confirm those orders, and issue yours. I have kept everyone up here, and no one will go until your subordinates take charge . . .

"Yes, I shall remain here as long as you feel it is necessary, and the personnel, doctors, attendants, nurses, are continuing as usual. You are absolutely right—the patients come first . . .

"Doctor Nordstorm? I am sorry to report he is among the dead. Yes, yes. Suicide, I believe. I really don't know, the investigation will tell . . . The mayor of Forlagne? Yes, in this very room at this moment—yes, superb decision and energy—" Sezille held up his palm to check the mayor who had risen to come to the telephone. "*Monsieur le Juge,* this is a bit premature, but as you are about to speak to him and he would never dare inform you himself, I shall give you another reason to congratulate him—

"At the dinner last night, he was to make a speech and an announcement. Because of this ghastly business, he did not get the chance. This will be a little more cheering, you know . . . What has he done? He has done something that should be imitated throughout France. He and a few wealthy farmers of this locality have formed a society to assist the needy relatives of local men who died for France, in the army, in the Resistance, as hostages—and to help exiles, ex-prisoners of war, to—you understand? . . .

"Yes, I quite agree, it's magnificent—and they're doing it with typical generosity. Each one is contributing an initial donation of ten thousand francs—and, listen, *Monsieur le Juge,* to avoid the fluctuations of the exchange, it is ten thousand Swiss francs—and that is but a beginning—they will contribute more when needed." Sezille laughed cheerfully. "I told them the same thing—but they assure me they have plenty. Accounts in Switzerland, accounts in France—

"Here is the mayor of Forlagne. I await your magistrate here. Good-bye, *Monsieur le Juge.*"

The three farmers had not smiled. The mayor was not smiling when he took over the telephone. But after listening for a minute, his lips lifted, his eyes shone, his whole face relaxed. "Oh, I beg of you, *Monsieur le Juge* . . . How? Well, er—of course, we have realized for a long time that the war hadn't ruined us as it had so many people—I don't know which of us got the idea first . . . Well, in a way, as I am mayor, and—oh, well I have no great ambitions, I am not an educated man . . . Yes, I'd be willing to take the chance—"

A while later, he hung up and turned a pale yet glowing face toward the spectators. "He says I may run for deputy!"

"Sure, on our dough!" Matignon shouted.

"Now, look here, it won't break us. And what was I going to say?" The mayor jabbed a quivering finger toward the telephone. "Go on, call him up and tell him it's all a fake, that this—this murderer made it all up because we can't—"

Sezille opened the door, waved them out. The argument had already become so absorbing that they left without a look at Nordstrom, whom they had heard a few minutes before numbered with the dead.

CHAPTER XVIII

A BARGAIN WITH DEATH

SEZILLE closed the door, shifted his chair to face Nordstrom.

"You heard what I said?"

"I did, yes."

"And?"

"I expected no mercy from you. Get on with it."

Sezille lighted a cigarette. "Are you a gambler, doctor?"

"That should be evident. If I hadn't

taken chances, would I be the loser now?"

"Do you want to die?"

"My personal desires are not involved."

"Look here, doctor—" Sezille draw a small wooden box from his pocket, took from it a tiny glass bottle, uncorked it, dropped two round pills on the desk. "I can't offer you freedom or even life. I want you to die. But there is something else I want for which I can grant you a little longer to live."

"What?"

"I'll tell you in a moment. First, if I turn you over to the authorities, how long do you think it would take for you to come trial, to be sentence and guillotined?"

"That depends on so many things," Nordstorm replied thoughtfully. "I think six to eight months to prepare the case, a trial to last a week or ten days. It would be very complicated, you know, many witnesses could be called."

"And you could appeal. Between the appeal, the plea for Presidential mercy, you might well live a year or eighteen months longer. You have money, you would have comforts." Sezille tapped the desk with one finger. "I know exactly what you are thinking, that with the fine lawyers your money could hire, taking into consideration your age, your past honorable record, your decorations, you might get off with a prison sentence or even be declared insane and shipped to some such establishment as you yourself conducted here. That I do not want to happen. I shall want a full confession from you. We shall all sign it."

Nordstrom shook his head slowly.

"I refuse. What would prevent you from killing me after I had signed? And why do you need my confession, if I am dead? You couldn't punish me further, unless we plunge into complex metaphysics."

"I would like a confession, Doctor Nordstorm, for several reasons: The first is that you were cleared of collaborating with the Occupants after my having accused you. That was a serious humiliation. I am normal, I would like to be vindicated without possible doubt."

"I see, yes. It would help you professionally."

"It would. Some people have considered me a monomaniac on the subject. Second: With a signed confession from you, the relatives of sundry people to be listed, among them Leonard and Marguerite Breboeuf, can open civil suit for damages and collect, against your estate. Third: In addition to the true charges, I shall impose upon you a bit—ask you to add a very few lines covering this morning's bloody mess, avoiding possible trouble to all concerned."

Nordstorm considered Sezille with attention. The shock of his arrest had aged him considerably, he had not shaved, his jowls hung slack. But his eyes remained alert, unchanged.

"I admit those reasons as valid. What guarantee can you give me that you will keep your word?"

"We'll come to that, Doctor. I have lived this moment in imagination a good many times, in the past few years. Lived it and lived for it. I made those pills several weeks ago, when this young man's information made me hope I could have you convicted of causing the murder of Albert Legrain. I made them because I could not make up my mind, you see, whether to kill you at the first opportunity, as I had sworn to do, or to be intelligent and practical, force a conviction with your signed confession, and stand vindicated in my home town.

"I thought tossing a coin would be puerile. So I am leaving it to chance in a way we both understand. One of those pills contain cyanide. You have your pick. They look absolutely alike, I did not even mark them for myself for fear of influencing you with a look, a movement. If you pick the wrong one, all is simplified, you die. If you pick the other, you live for a while, and you write the confession I dictate."

"I must repeat myself. What guarantee is there that you will not kill me after I sign a confession? You have already told the judge I was dead."

"Put yourself in my place," Sezille protested. "I had to—if you do die, it must have happened before we had a chance to prevent it. Otherwise, there might be questions as to why you were left to cheat justice."

"How will you explain my survival—if I survive?"

"Are you serious?" Sezille waved his hand toward the door. "Those three farmers saw you alive even as I was speak-

ing. It was a misunderstanding, a slip of the tongue. I used Nordstrom instead of Charpiat."

"Is Charpiat dead?" Nordstrom turned his glance on Bruce with interest. "Curious, I'd never have thought it of Monsieur Kerrigan."

Bruce grumbled and shrugged with an air of indifference.

"Your guarantee?" Sezille resumed. "I give you my word as an honest man, a Frenchman, a physician, that if you win the pick, I shall not take any action against you—save, of course, in court, as a witness."

Nordstrom looked into Sezille's eyes a long moment.

"Tempting." He smiled nervously. "Not enough guarantee."

Sezille rose and paced the floor restlessly a while.

"Doctor Nordstrom, you may know I had a son. He died. It was also because of that I took an oath. Now, I swear to you, on his memory, that after you have accepted my offer, taken the pill, you never need fear further physical harm from me."

"I'd accept that," Nordstorm decided. "But why need we bother with the gamble? With that confession, you're sure of your vengeance."

"I have just told you, Doctor." Sezille twisted his hands. "I swore to kill you like a dog as soon as I had the chance. At that time, the Boches were here, nobody inquired too much into one more death. Times have changed. Vindication would help me. I have more to win, and more to lose. But it seems cowardice to hesitate. I must be sure I am not sparing you from fear. I'll let Fate decide."

"And," Nordstrom said confidently, "there's a subconscious block, you are not so sure I am the criminal you thought. You have recovered a sense of proportion about that necessary denunciation. You lighten your conscience somewhat if you leave the selection to me."

"Perhaps so."

"I cannot write with my hands tied." Nordstrom's ropes were taken off by Carmelin. Bruce watched curiously. He had thought that nothing done by Sezille would surprise him. The Frenchman was somewhat eccentric, with excellent reasons.

Nordstrom spoke again. "May I examine those pills?"

"You may look at them, but do not handle them."

"May I have a glass of water? Or brandy?"

"Brandy, if you like," Sezille agreed. He was smiling amiably as he filled a small glass.

Nordstrom's chair was pushed to its former place at the center of the desk. He brought some sheets of paper before him, picked up the fountain pen from its stand, looked at the point.

"I'll write that confession, Doctor Sezille. I've never lost a sizable gamble in my life until today. It would be miraculous if it happened again within a few hours." He reached out slowly, but Sezille caught his wrist.

"Now what?"

"Indicate which one you want. I'll give it to you."

"The one on the right. My right, not yours. Yes."

Sezille picked up the pill on a small spoon, dropped it into Nordstrom's mouth. The old man swallowed without hesitation, reached for the small glass of brandy.

Again, Sezille stopped him.

"You win, Doctor. Better have this later. Your hand is none too steady as it is. Do you think you can write?"

They looked at each other. Then Nordstrom's hands went to his face, in an odd, quivering gesture, half-thanks, half-prayer. He wiped his eyes, which were watering. Sezille was perspiring now as much as the older man.

Then Nordstrom hunched his shoulders several times, moved his fingers before his eyes.

"Let's get it over with," he snapped brusquely. He wiped his face, his hands, on a handkerchief, picked up the pen, scrawled a few words on the first sheet, tossed it aside. "You see, it's legible. But it remains understood that after I have signed this I have fulfilled your request and that I can arrange for my defense as I see fit, including a repudiation of this document? . . . Good. Now, dictate—"

"It's quite short, doctor, quite short."

"All the better. I feel very hungry. I hope you won't starve me." He chuckled. "Let's hurry."

SEZILLE had finished dictating from a prepared paper. The old doctor signed with a flourish, reached for a stamping tool. "This makes it twice as official, it's the seal of the sanatorium. Probably the last time I use it. Gentlemen, your turn, as neutral witnesses. And may I have that brandy?"

Sezille scanned the confession, beckoned to Carmelin and Bruce, who signed. The young Frenchman folded the paper, placed it in his wallet, pushed the glass toward Nordstrom, who tossed it off, clucked his tongue in appreciation.

"Tie him up again, Carmelin."

"Oh, I say, that isn't necessary," Nordstrom protested. But the mechanic trussed him up as before. "I'd like breakfast, something to eat."

"No, you don't want anything to eat," Sezille told him. "You gave me one very bad moment, you swine. I was afraid you were a pill-chewer. Some doctors are. But when you asked for water, I knew it was going well."

"What do you mean?"

"Look." Sezille picked up the remaining pill with the spoon, placed it on a saucer. Very deliberately, he took out a penknife, opened the small blade. The edge of the blade he placed on the pill, tapped the back gently with the spoon until the little ball split into halves. Then he indicated the sections with the tip of the blade. "Somewhat like a Jordan almond. Proportionately, the coating is very thick and of the right composition. However, if you had crunched it between your teeth, you'd have reached this—" he pointed—"and pfft!"

"That's the poisoned pill, eh?" Nordstrom said, leaning forward.

"No more, no less than the other. When the coating is absorbed—your gastric juices and the brandy are working on that now—you'll die."

"I don't believe you. You gave me your word. You swore on your son—" Nordstrom stammered, checked himself with a tremendous effort, laughed. "I see there's nothing in the understanding about mental torture. You want to scare me."

"Yes, I want to scare you. I can't touch you, but I can look."

"You lied, you said—"

"I told you one pill was poisoned, the other I did not specify. I was most careful not to. Fortunately, you were inattentive."

"You tricked me? You abused my good faith?"

"Deliberately and without remorse."

"You're lying now—you—" Nordstrom started to tremble, he wept.

"I'm getting out of here," Bruce said suddenly.

"All right. Take Carmelin along, start on your breakfast. I should be along in a few minutes." He drew a chair before the sobbing old man, laughed happily. "The doctor will understand my professional interest. There's a little moment, just at the finish, that I don't want to miss."

IT WAS a good three weeks after his return to Paris that Bruce thought of visiting his doctor. He was feeling very well, he slept like a hibernating woodchuck, and the crazy mess at the Sana was fading, seemed like a forgotten dream. The local papers had published a few items about "L'Affaire Nordstrom," giving highly distorted details. He had seen perhaps ten lines in a Paris paper, attributing the trouble to displaced persons rioting because they were anxious to be shipped home.

"What did I tell you?" the doctor said after a check-up. "Nothing like a few quiet weeks in the country. Anyway, there was little wrong with you save an overworked imagination, restlessness. You have a tendency to worry. For instance, all those questions about brain lesions. You may not know what you're doing, young fellow, but I do—you'll be coming around complaining, and I'll have to charge you for the privilege of patting you on the back.

"You were beaten by the Gestapo, yes. And you have fallen, you say. Well, of the two of us, and I can't remember ever being hurt in the head—solid spot, ah—I am exactly as apt to go mad as you are. Go, I bless you, and I shall charge you five hundred francs for each repetition."

Bruce walked to his office. Would he ever see any of those people again? Or would they drop into the past the way his war comrades had vanished? He had invitations from Sezille and Bejart to fish, to hunt, to loaf.

Mother Jeanne had told him, of course, that he was welcome at any time, for as long as he liked, in memory of her son, Alain. But there was a certain reserve in her manner. She somehow blamed him for having engineered Prosper's large donation to the cause, and while she was willing to discount ill-gotten profits within the family, she had not liked to see such a large sum deflected to the general weal. Which did not prevent her from sending packages containing eggs, butter and preserves to him.

He sat down at his desk and spotted the envelope at once. It was the first letter from Nicolas since his return. It turned out to be short and very much to the point:

Mother says it would be all right with her for me to go to a Lycée in Paris instead of Dijon or Lyons. You are my next of kin, just like Alain would have been, and I could come and spend my free days with you. Mother says that it would be an imposition, but I told her you wouldn't mind.

After all, it was me that first put you on to the doings at the Sana, and if it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't have been here at all and you'd have missed all the fun.

Just as soon as you answer yes, Mother will find out about schools and prices and all that—

Bruce tossed the letter aside. Then he sighed and picked up the pen.

THE END

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OF BLOOD

A Caradosso Story

By

F. R. BUCKLEY

Slipping to one side, Beppo goaded him where one usually goads an ox.

AND BROTHERS

TO HIS SERENITY my very good Lord Pietro IV, Duke of Rometia and so following; from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these;

Sire:

I am just back from one of my little muleback tours of Your Excellency's dominions, and have a little story I should like to tell Your Grace.

It is *not* a story of the present day or of Your Eminence's duchy—I must again deny the idea once expressed by Your Serenity, that I make these tours to pry into and pick holes in Your Lordship's government. Nay: just as Your Highness makes progresses from time to time so that the vulgar may remember that they have a Duke, so I on my mule occasionally pervade the countryside to remind folk that,

though long retired and replaced in the Captaincy by a wet-nosed boy of forty, I am still alive; and at four-score years still ready to resume command should war come and should this new "captain" meet with any accident.

Not that I would wish for any war or any such accident, God knoweth, at least until I have got my grapes harvested; which with good weather should be about a month from now; but I must tell Your Grace that certain of Your Highness' condescensions on recent progresses have caused misunderstandings among the common people such as in my view might lead to civil strife while the grapes are still on the vine—a catastrophe for both of us.

For instance, I was told at Istri that last Christmas, when the burgesses waited on Your Eminence, Your Grace soundly rated your steward for keeping them standing a mere couple of hours in the snow. From which folly undoubtedly came the terrible incident (at Mola) wherein, without other excuse than a broken leg—and although accompanied by guardsmen who could have held him upright—the Count of Mafaldo actually dared to *sit* in the presence of Your Grace! At a public audience! And his lands adjoining Your Lordship's own!

The people who told me about this in the wine-shop almost laughed—they are not laughing now, moreover the wine-shop is no longer there; the stove turned over during the fighting, and it burned down. But no efforts on my part can long atone for such imprudences by Your Lordship.

I am not against kindness to commoners. Simply, I beseech Your Eminence—but no; if I beseech, Your Highness will again say I am trying to advise Your Grace. I will proceed, as I at first proposed, with my little story.

PIETRO II, Your Lordship's grandfather, was then on the throne; and to placate a visiting nobleman whose guard-captain (by Pietro's orders) I had killed in a duel, Pietro had ordered me hanged. As was customary on such occasions, I had escaped from the castle by the main gate (the guard-sergeant rigging the usual rope from the cell-window to please the visitor) and as usual I went to take service with some jack-noble until the thing should have blown over. Those sojourns in the hills and swamps were cursed dull; but His Grace, God rest him, was too miserly to pay full wages when I was not on duty, and I had several families to support.

My refuge this time was with a pleasant-looking young count named Beppo; I cannot remember his last name, nor does it matter. He had been away at a university, doubtless reading books as they do in such places, and had succeeded reluctantly to the county when his father was murdered. The old count, as I understood it, had placed a tax on bread and someone with a low passion for that article had stabbed him to death. Naturally his lordship's chamberlain had at once caused the peasant to be torn apart by four horses and his pieces hung in a cage in the public square. And the first thing his new lordship had done was to give the bits burial and dismiss the chamberlain and guard-captain.

I was of course glad to find employment after only a week; sorry that it must be with a youth so lily-handed; but hopeful that he would some day see the light. Meantime I expected that his weakness would lead to uprisings, riots and suchlike which would save me from boredom.

But it turned out that he was not weak at all. Just mad—as so many young folks are nowadays—from reading of those books. There was already in existence a Council of Twenty, made up of the leading merchants of the city. Now to these he proposed to add another council—of twenty yokels from the country!

"Of the kind that killed your lordship's father?" I asked encouragingly; and he looked at me under his eyebrows.

"Had my father had such a council, he might have been here today, and I happy in Padua. None but city fools would have imagined that bread-tax. It marvels me only that the peasants did not march on the town and sack it."

"They will not do so while I have the honor to be here," I told him.

"They will have no occasion to do so," says he; and for a moment I feared he might add he would have no occasion for a guard.

But he was not so mad as that. I took courage.

"Hath your lordship decided where this

council is to meet?" I asked. "Because I would fain see the place and make arrangements—"

"Meet?" says he. "Where but in the council chamber?"

I stared at him.

"The council chamber, my lord?"

"Where else?"

"With the carpets? And the hangings? The *peasants*, my lord?"

"Yes. And I shall be there, Caradosso. And so will you. Unless your dignity and cleanliness forbid?"

There was a look in his eye which confined me to saluting.

"Didst never spit on a carpet thyself, Captain?" quotha; and before I could answer at the requisite length, snapped: "Dismissed!"

Yes.

Dismissed, it turned out, to catch this new Council of Twenty like so many lice in a blanket; while Beppo read in his books about the councils of the ancient Athenians. I do not know how the Athenians may have managed, Your Grace, but *I* had to hunt these ploughtail councillors out of every hiding hole from pigsties to tree-tops. Having been properly brought up under his late lordship, the peasants could not imagine being invited to the city for any reason except hanging; while the few little landowners I managed to snare (peasants too, but able to make their marks on parchment) were sure not only that they would be hanged; but that their land would be taken from them. So much for education!

The first time they assembled in the council chamber—their council day was different from the merchants—they would not sit down; they huddled together standing in the middle of the room and after they had listened to a welcoming speech by Beppo (so polite I could scarce understand half of it) they kneeled before him and asked if, for the sake of their wives and families, they could go now. They would never, they protested, commit any sin whatever thenceforth.

The second time, having talked things over in their huts, I suppose, they were not so hard to persuade (I had had to keep them tied to stirrups the first time) and some of them sat on the uncarpeted spaces of the council chamber floor.

The third time they sat on the carpets; the fourth, some of them sat in chairs; and by the end of six months they were as much at home among the velvet hangings and the portraits of his lordship's ancestors (all of whom must have been turning in their graves) as they were in their own barn-yards. No, I am wrong; because while they respected their cows and pigs and so on, they soon began to exhibit a contempt for the hangings, the portraits and his lordship himself. They began to ask themselves, of what had they been terrified all these years? And well do I remember the day when first one lout produced from the recesses of his rags a sausage which he set about to eat.

I will not harrow Your Grace with details of the laws they began to propose. When extracted from their horrible dialect, they were such as would simply have made the county a wasteland and his lordship a pauper. And when he refused (usually by the means of telling them their plan had been tried in ancient Rome without success) the brutes went away and muttered in their cottages until time for the next council. At which they would propose things more outrageous still. My spies (for of course while seizing the leading peasants I had not omitted to bribe some of the less successful) in fact reported in such fashion as to make me apprehensive of a revolt. Which, however amusing, it was my duty to prevent if possible.

I did my best in the circumstances. For instance, doubtless as the result of my prayers for peace, the lout who had eaten the sausage and who had seemed to be in some sort a leader, was found drowned one morning in his own well.

But results hardly justified that trouble; the fact was, as I explained to Beppo, that the peasants were too far out of hand for a mere private drowning to have any effect on them.

"Private drowning?" asks Beppo, looking at me sharply.

"Accidental, I should have said, your lordship. What I mean is that if your lordship, next time he is publicly insulted, could publicly hang a couple of those fellows . . . Or even just one, my lord . . . Well, then, throw a few into prison—"

It was no use. He shook his head at each proposal, and at each shake regarded me with less favor. I could see a vision of myself and the wretched guard I had not

had time to train, confronted by thousands of peasants armed with scythes and hayforks; nasty weapons when—as we probably should be—one is forbidden to fire.

"Your lordship is going to let matters take their own course?" I asked. "Their demands are getting greater and greater, sir; they are already beyond reason; and with each one your lordship refuses, the danger—"

He snapped his fingers at the danger. Some day I must count how many of my wounds have been preceded by some noble's snapping his fingers.

"They are learning," says he. "At first they were afraid. Now they are foolish. Soon they will be used to their new estate and become reasonable."

"As with the proposal," says I (it had been made at the last council), "that your lordship should have all their corn ground for them free."

"I showed them why that was not possible!"

"And one of them replied by saying your lordship's father had stolen his mill and would roast in hell for it."

"Do you kill a puppy," demands his lordship, "because it is not housebroke?"

"Certainly," says I; because Holy Writ enjoins us to answer a fool according to his folly.

"Then I think," says he slowly, "I must hire me a new guard-captain, Messer Caradosso. Private drowning, eh? I will consider that slip of the tongue also. Meantime—dismissed!"

SLIP of the tongue or no, the results of that accident to the sausage-eater woundily disappointed me.

When, as I have shown, the count further refused to assist me, I almost despaired; and when, at the next council, I found that the sausage-eater had been replaced by the natural son of a petty noble—his name was Ercole Vasti, he had a farm in the north of the county and when capturing my councillors I had avoided him like poison—I was completely without hope.

He was an educated man, this Vasti; moreover a sharp, ambitious fellow who because of his half-rank could lead the peasantry like sheep. From among the twenty, slouching in their chairs as they had now come to do, he stood out like a castle in a plain. He even wore a sword.

Count Beppo greeted him.

"I have heard of you, sir," he said, bowing courteously. He was smiling.

"I have heard of you also," says Vasti; and he was not smiling. Indeed, he said the words in such a way that it seemed he had heard naught good of his lordship; and the yokels in the chairs laughed outright.

When they ceased, there was a silence. Being in my proper place behind his lordship, I could not see his face, but I had a certain idea that his smile was departing.

"May I bring to your notice, messire," says he at last, "that you have forgotten to remove your hat?"

"*Hat?*" says Ercole Vasti; and looked at his fellow councillors. Most of them had their hats on; some, sitting in one velvet chair, had their dirty feet on another. All now looked at Ercole as he stood there pretending to be bewildered; and laughed like so many mules braying.

"*Hat?*" says Ercole again, to make them laugh more.

"Aye, hat, messire," says his lordship; and to my amaze stepped forward and knocked Ercole's cap across the council chamber.

Then, keeping his eyes on Vasti, he made a gesture I have seen ah! how many times; but which never should I have expected from him.

He stretched out his hand toward me and snapped his fingers. I immediately put the hilt of my sword into it.

"Beware, sire!" I cried suddenly thereafter; remembering too late that on this day of all days I had been wearing a court sword a hand's breadth shorter than the weapon Vasti now whipped from its loops.

But it was too late for warnings—not, as Your Grace will see, that such were really needed.

Vasti came forward like a mad bull; there was a moment of swift clash—Beppo still on the dais, but encumbered by the state robe he had worn to honor the yokels; and then, with the easiest grace in the world Beppo raised his foot, kicked Vasti's blade aside, pushed him violently in the chest and, while the man staggered back half the length of the room, laid down his sword and the table and divested himself of his surcoat.

As Vasti returned, spitting barnyard words and taking more care over his attack than before, says Beppo to me, "Keep the councillors in the room, Luigi. There is something I would explain to them later."

He was down at floor level now, circling around Vasti as Vasti circled around him; and it was evident from the stance he took—almost upright, none of your Neapolitan crouches held over from cloak-and-dagger days—that he had found time amid his studies to learn which end of a sword by rights went into an opponent.

Nor, apparently, had Vasti's father neglected his education—indeed, in my experience, bastards have usually been better swordsmen than boys from the right side of the blanket; having perhaps more occasion for fighting. All my own sons, for instance—but I digress.

The other councillors would have been gone before I could get to them, but for the circumstance of having tried all to get through the door at one time; I found them jammed, extracted them from between jambs and reduced them to sitting positions along the wall.

"Ah, *bello, bello!*" says I, stirring one of the councillors with my foot. "Didst see that?"

It was lost on him, of course, but what I had called beautiful was indeed so—one of the neatest and least scrupulous recoveries ever I saw outside of a garrison wine shop.

Vasti had driven Beppo backward, backward, with the idea of trapping him among the council's deserted chairs. A sixth sense must have warned his lordship, however; and, as I now saw, he must have kept very low company at one time or another. Because, finding his balance going—his heels were against one chair that had been overthrown—he abandoned all rules of gentle duello; beat Vasti's blade up to a height whence it should have descended most fatally on his head and, before it could do so, dived forward and drove that head into his adversary's belly.

Then, slipping to one side as Vasti doubled over, he goaded him, lightning-fast, just where one usually goads an ox.

Naturally the yokels liked that. They roared with laughter. Clapping his hand to his bottom, Vasti roared also; but with rage. He turned and fell on Beppo like a windmill gone lunatic. To which form of attack Beppo, I was glad and amazed to see, opposed a strictly classical defense. Ah, ah, Your Grace, I began to see that this was a remarkable young man. He could be vulgar while others were being chaste and chaste while his opponent was becoming vulgar; thus confusing him and putting him ever in the wrong. Which is the basis of good swordplay, of women's dealings with men and, as I have sometimes thought, possibly of good government also.

Not that government is any business of mine until it has led to war; as it certainly will if Your Highness persists in hobnobbing with his inferiors.

I digress again; and then too I have said all that in my beginning of this story which I am simply telling you for Your Highness' amusement . . .

SO, FOR some time (until his buttock began to stiffen) Vasti hammered away at Beppo's defense; but soon—trying to lunge and finding his leg betray him—Vasti began cautious tactics, pivoting on his good leg and fencing according to the book. In which situation Beppo began to dance about and send in lunges evidently meant to do no damage, meantime shouting, "So-ha! So-ha!" like a mountebank at a fair.

I did not understand the purpose of such antics until I saw the council's eyes were bulging as they had not during the deadly beginning of the fight; Beppo was playing on their ignorance, to impress them, while slowly he wore Vasti down without killing or even wounding him again.

Now, not being a swordsman, Your Grace cannot know, of course, that no man's arm alone can endure even five minutes of fight; and, anchored as he now was on one spot, unable to advance, retreat or leap sidewise, Vasti had nothing but his arm to rely on. He could protect himself with nothing but parries; and slower and slower these became—I knew how he felt, poor devil, his arm weighing more and more at each effort; I saw the sweat of fear break out atop the other sweat, just below the line of his hair; it began to run down into his eyes; I saw the eyes take on the look of a cornered animal's; I saw his mouth open and his

tongue lick his dry lips; and then, as Beppo drew back for a moment to launch a new attack, I saw Vasti drop his point to the carpet and stand waiting.

Beppo dropped his point to the carpet likewise. For a long moment the twain looked at each other; and then, turning his head toward the staring council, my lord said:

"I am not going to kill this signor, as I might. You may wonder why I have fought him. It was because he did not take off his hat. *You* have never taken off your hats in my presence; I have excused *you* because you knew no better. This signor did know better. I allow familiarities from animals and children, but not from men. And henceforward—"

Vasti moved. He must have been gathering his muscles while Beppo spoke; now, before I could open my mouth in warning, he shot forward a thrust which should have speared Beppo, turned as he was, from side to side straight through the heart and both lungs. As I learned later, the thrust was a trifle too far forward; the point struck on the curve of a rib and ran across Beppo's chest under the flesh. It burst forth through on the other side of his doublet, though, bloody as if it had gone through him; and I worked the dagger out of my sleeve and stepped forward for vengeance.

I was not needed.

For an instant, though knowing he had missed his stroke, Vasti held on to the hilt of his sword. In that instant, Beppo raised his own blade and chopped him sidehanded across the knuckles; then, as the coward let go, he turned, the sword still sticking out from both sides of his doublet, and ran Vasti through the heart.

He stood looking down at him until he stopped jerking; then, very pale, he pulled Vasti's sword as it were out of himself and with it all bloody in his hand, smiled at the council.

"I shall expect to see you here again—with better manners—next month," says he in a tone they had never heard before. "You may let them go now, Luigi."

But, Your Grace, they never came again; no, that was the end of the Peasants' Council. I knew it would be, from the way they took certain remarks I made as I drove them down the stairs.

"So there you are, my masters," I said encouragingly. "'Tis a great day for you. Henceforth, as his lordship was about to say, you'll no longer be treated as children howling for the moon, but as full-grown men—"

"To be stuck like pigs!" cries one of them.

I spread my hands.

"What would you?" I asked them. "Children are humored and ignored. Men are treated according to their deserts. You cannot have it both ways, you know, my masters."

"He-he-he!" says the oldest of them. "Just because his lordship scorned ye, ye thought—I told ye so! Remember? I told ye so!"

He meant they had thought his lordship was a fool and a weakling; terms which I am sure neither the Count of Mafaldo nor the burgesses whom (as above) Your Grace rescued from standing in the snow, would dream of applying to Your Excellency—*yet*.

And if ever they do make the error of applying them and act accordingly, I stand ready, as I said, to replace the young man now heading Your Grace's army (I have a curious presentiment that he, like that sausage eater, might fall down a well) and repress the revolution with loving firmness.

Granted, of course, if I am at that time still alive.

Perhaps, of course, I shall by that time have joined Your Highness' father and grandfather and be answering their celestial questions on Your Grace's government of the duchy.

I hope my report may be accurate, even though it raise Their Excellencies' ghostly hair on their heads. It is to be remembered, of course, that while Your Highness makes his progresses on tall and valuable chargers (aside from their value, I have always been fond of Arabians)—my point of view is different; evidently it must be, since I travel on the back of a mule.

Not a very good mule either; but doubtless sufficient, in his old age and mine,

For Your Grace's humble servant,

L. Caradosso,
Captain.

ENDORSEMENT BY THE DUKE

Send him a horse, send him a horse!

Stacey hammered through the gap, and jumped into the lead.

THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN MEOLA

By JOHN PRESCOTT

I, AL STONE, was sitting on one of the piers of the Haley Dock Yard, reading Old Man Haley's letter, when I saw Big Jim Cory come out of the machine shop and head out my way. I wasn't particularly interested in gassing with Big Jim right then, because the Old Man's letter had my mind turning over close to 6500 RPM and I wanted to be alone to think it over.

I never questioned the Old Man's wisdom or savvy on anything, certainly not on speedboat racing; and especially racing the hot-rod 225-cubic-inch hydroplanes. But what I saw in that letter made me wonder if Old Man Haley hadn't somehow or other wandered off the main line.

Then I heard Big Jim's feet clumping along the planking of the pier, and I knew he wanted to know what I was read-

ing. It didn't make much difference if he knew then or later; he or any of the gang in the shop for that matter. I'd have to tell 'em all anyway.

"From the Old Man, Al?" he asked, squatting down behind me, and bobbing his matted black head over my shoulder.

"Yeah, from the Old Man," I said. "He's coming home. He'll be back here in Detroit in two weeks."

"Uh-huh," Big Jim grunted. "Anything else? Anything new in Miami?"

"Yeah," I answered, sliding my eyes around to see his face, brown and curious over my shoulder. "He's got a new driver, for the 225. And he's rigged a match race with Scud Johnson at Havre de Grace on the twenty-fifth of this month."

"Oh-ho," he said, rounding out the "ho," and giving it a sort of speculative lift. Then he angled around and sat cross-legged on the planks in front of me.

"The Old Man don't give up, does he?" he said, looking up at me as though he already knew the answer to that one.

"No, he don't." I agreed. "The Old Man never will give up chasing Scud Johnson; until he beats him. I figure that's his lifetime work. He's spent ten years, and almost fifty grand to date, and he ain't going to stop now—not if he sinks his last dime in it."

"What about this new driver?" Big Jim asked, after a moment of staring into the ruffled blue of the river. "Who is he? Got a rep, has he?"

"Had a rep is better, Jim," he said. "This one the Old Man pulled out of cold storage. Remember Art Stacey? He was pretty hot about ten, fifteen years ago. Then he retired. That's the Old Man's new boy."

BIG JIM got to his feet and lobbed a rock at a gull, floating inoffensively in the water off the end of the pier. The gull squawked with injured dignity and lifted into the air.

"What the hell," Jim said, turning angrily, and putting his big, greasy hands on his hips. "Is the Old Man going soft in the head, putting Stacey in a 225? That guy is damn near as ancient as the Old Man. They're a couple of old barnacles, both of them. Why," Jim went on in mounting rage, "Scud Johnson will make hash of Stacey in one lap. He'll scare him half to death before he ever steps in the boat. He'll talk him out of his race the same way he's done with every driver he ever came up against."

He stopped abruptly and let his hands fall expressively to his sides.

"I don't get it," he said in final rebuttal.

"I don't either," I said, "but it ain't none of our business. All you and I got to do is make sure that 225 is too hot to touch. We're just the greaseballs for *Haley's Comet*, and who the Old Man gets to drive it don't concern us in the least."

Big Jim didn't say anything to that, but when he sat down beside me again I knew he was thinking the same things that I was. When you spend the best years of your life souping a race boat, you figure you got a right to see her win once in a while. And when your boss rings in an old crustacean like Art Stacey, you begin to wonder if all that time you spent has been worthwhile.

We sat there for a minute or two, quietly, just staring at the sun-splashed river, thinking. It was one of those early June days. It was racing time again, and it was spring. And spring was warm and friendly like the broad, wide open smile of a big, blowzy blonde. The air was fresh and full of new smells. Anticipation rode on the river breeze and the water, stirred by its urgency, chuckled around the pilings beneath us.

"We better get going," Big Jim said, after a couple of minutes. "If we gotta turn the *Comet* over to Grandfather Stacey, we might as well start getting her in shape right now."

We pulled ourselves to our feet and started walking up the pier, past the boat slips, filling now with cruisers, sloops and smart, sleek mahogany power boats; up past the tall angular sail loft, toward the wide open double doors of the machine shop.

Walking along the pier I thought mostly about Scud Johnson. There were a lot of mean guys in the world, but Scud got his meanness in wholesale lots. Scud was big—big in the spread of his muscle-bound shoulders, and in the solidness of his thick, stocky legs, and big in the head and mouth.

His head was black, and somehow al-

ways looked oily, like he'd been lying around in a grease pit. His small pig-eyes were accented and wired in place by a pair of black, hairy eyebrows which bowed across his forehead and dipped to a point above a flaring fighter's nose.

And then there was his mouth, always going, never stopping—like a radio commercial. It was his stock in trade, noise and lots of it. It was like advertising or propaganda, constant repetition, and the surprising thing about it was that sooner or later it got into the guys that drove against him, and they got to believing what the big jerk said.

Right then and there was when Scud won his race, with his big mouth. Scud was a good driver, sure, and he'd had a lot of throttle time in his day. He'd been driving the 225's ever since the first Ventnor hull had slapped the water with its smooth bottom, and the first Ford conversion burped blue smoke from its stacks. Scud was a good driver, but no phenomenon. There might be guys who could beat his throttle, but I had yet to see one who would beat his big mouth.

I thought about that as Big Jim and I passed into the sudden, contrasting darkness of the machine shop, and I didn't think that Art Stacey was the man to do the job. It seemed that the Old Man was grabbing straws in the wind; that like the draft board, he was dragging the bottom of the barrel.

HALEY'S COMET was a hot article, an eighty-five mile an hour proposition that never took a second to anyone, except Scud Johnson. She was eighteen feet of mahogany dynamite, trim and sleek as a Follies beauty. And she was fast. Big Jim and I had seen to that. We had poured all the loving care and skill into her chrome-plated barrels that a pair of dyed-in-the-wool speed merchants can. She was right in every way, and she was good enough to take Scud Johnson, if her driver was.

The day before the Old Man got back, I took her out in the river just to make sure. Big Jim and some of the boys in the shop set up a three-mile rectangular course, with flag buoy markers, the same course Stacey would have to drive at Havre de Grace.

We lowered the *Comet* into the water with one of the Dock Yard's marine derricks, and I got into her to take the first spin of the season.

Big Jim steadied her while I settled down in the cockpit. It felt good sitting in there again, just like the other years, when I always made the warm-up runs. I primed her good, giving her a couple of generous shots of methanol. Then I kicked the starter.

She came out howling, tossing her bow high in the air, and tunneling a big rooster tail of spray far out behind. Then I gave her more throttle, and the prop bit hard in the water and brought the bow down to plane. She sang like a banshee and scampered across the water like all the fiends in hell. I could feel the hard, satisfying slap of the hull on the river, and the vibration signaled swirls of excitement up and down my spine.

I took her around the course three times, forcing her hard on the stretches, and broadsiding wide on the turns, throwing the flashing spray high to the side. She ran smooth, and the surging power of the engine was all that Jim and I had hoped for. I watched the oil pressure and RPM closely, judging the sudden sweep of the tachometer needle when I poured on the coal. But she was right. She answered the throttle right on the nose, and I knew she'd do a job for us if only Stacey had the goods.

I swung her into the pier at the end of the third lap and cut the switch as Big Jim caught the bow and swung her around so I could get out.

"Look at this," he said, passing me a stopwatch. "Not bad, Al. You kicked the *Comet* around those nine miles in just about nine minutes."

I climbed up onto the pier and he passed me a cigarette. We stood there for a couple of minutes, smoking and looking down at the *Comet,* lying big and beautiful in the water.

"We better get her out," I said. "We ought to tear the engine down again tonight. We can have her ready for Stacey and the Old Man when they get in tomorrow."

"And the course markers?" Big Jim asked.

"Leave those in," I said, snorting a little. "Stacey will need a couple of days

out there to find out what in hell he's doing."

But Stacey didn't show. The next noon, when the Old Man's long black car wheeled into the drive and crunched over the gravel of the parking lot, Stacey wasn't in it; just the Old Man, sitting white-haired and smiling, at the wheel.

"What the hell," I said, when he got out and waddled, short and fat, into the showroom. "Where's Art Stacey? Ain't he coming?"

"Nope," Old Man Haley said, still smiling. "What's the matter? Ain't you glad to see me? Why the long face?"

"What do you mean, he ain't coming?" I asked. "We got the *Comet* waiting for him. We even got a course out in the river for him. Ain't he gonna drive?"

"Now, don't race your motor," he said, in a tone that he'd use on a pet spaniel. "Sure, Stacey's going to drive. Only he ain't coming here. He's going direct to Havre de Grace. We'll meet him there next week."

I exhaled loudly.

"Where's Big Jim?" he asked, ignoring me, and looking over the showroom to see what he'd missed since he'd been away.

"Out in the shop, working on the *Comet*."

"Go get him. I want to talk to you two together. A matter of strategy," he said, winking.

I walked out into the shop looking for Jim and wondering vaguely if maybe the sun down in Miami hadn't been a little too much for the Old Man. First he pulled his old vegetating oyster out of a brine barrel to drive one of the hottest boats in the country against Scud Johnson, and now he tells me the guy ain't even gonna drive the boat until a half hour or so before race time. I wasn't anywhere near making sense out of it. Neither was Big Jim.

"Hey, boss," he said, when we were back in the showroom, "how come Stacey ain't gonna drive the *Comet* until she gets to Havre de Grace?"

"Because he doesn't have to. He's had all the practice he needs. We borrowed a 225 from Charlie Barker down in Miami for a week or so. He got some nice workouts. Ran good time. And he'll do that much better in the *Comet*. Right now I've got Stacey out of circulation."

"Hmm?" Big Jim said.

"That's what I said, out of circulation. It's part of the strategy. He doesn't show to anyone until he drives at Havre de Grace."

Jim scratched his head doubtfully. I just sat there, quietly. I didn't say anything at all. To do so would have been like trying to reason with a very small child.

"And in line with that," the Old Man went on blithely, "when we get to Havre de Grace, I will be in the pits with him. Alone."

"You mean that Big Jim and me won't be in the pits?" I asked, not quite believing what I'd heard him say.

"That's right. Oh, nothing personal in it," he hastened to say. "It's just part of the strategy. You see, boys, I don't want anyone around him, except me, and Scud Johnson."

"Scud!" Big Jim and me said together.

"Yes, Scud," the Old Man went on, unperturbed. "Ordinarily, Scud Johnson would be the last person I would want to have one of my drivers meet. But this time it's different. I want their personalities to mingle," he said loftily. "I think it will be interesting."

That ended it. The Old Man took his fat hulk and his senile mind behind the closed doors of his office, and Big Jim and I went out into the shop to prepare the *Comet* for what I thought would be the worst hiding she ever got. Neither of us said anything, but I was privately thinking that Old Man Haley was well on his way to being a candidate for one of the more select mental homes.

THEY had a nice course laid out at Havre de Grace. I could see that from the top of the *Comet's* trailer, where Big Jim and I had been banished after we put her in the water. It was the same sort of course we had laid out for Stacey, and which he'd never used—a three-mile rectangle, with two nice straight-a-ways. They had orange flag buoys for course markers, and I knew that if Stacey wasn't completely blind, he could find his way around there for three laps.

The water was right too. A brisk breeze was kicking it up into a nice four-inch chop, just enough to give the boats plenty

of lift. The air was damp, high humidity for good carburetion. Everything seemed O.K., or almost. We had the boat, and we had the weather. All we needed was a driver.

We had one, but only after a fashion it seemed. Down below us a few yards, in the improvised pits, Old Man Haley and Art Stacey were hovered over the *Comet*. Stacey was a dried-up little man, the same age as the Old Man or thereabouts, with thinning silvered hair and a bland expression on a round, reddish face. He was wearing a disreputable pair of faded blue dungarees and a brilliant orange life-jacket several sizes too large. He looked like he might have hitch-hiked all the way from Miami.

After a couple of minutes I saw Stacey climb into the *Comet*, to give her a spin around the course. He looked kind of ridiculous, sitting in the cockpit with a white crash hat pulled down over his ears, sort of like a fresh mushroom.

The engine kicked over smooth, and Stacey gunned her out onto the course. In a moment he brought the bow down out of the clouds and I heard the rising crescendo of the engine as he took the *Comet* down past the committee barge with the large, white-faced starting clock on it. He let her ride easily into the first turn, far down the course, and I saw the rising tail of spray as he jammed the throttle to broadside her around to the far side.

He came down the other side of the course toward the pits, the *Comet* just skittering over the low chop, and the engine winding up nice and high in a powerful flow of rhythm. I watched him cut the throttle for the turn and the *Comet* responded beautifully, carrying him around and out to the far buoy. He thundered down past the committee barge again, just riding her, nothing spectacular.

And then I lost all interest in watching Art Stacey, because I saw Scud's trailer wheel into the pits. Scud got out, looking mean and menacing, and stood for a moment, facing the water and watching Stacey go into the far turn. Then he went over into our pit to talk to the Old Man. I had an idea of the kind of talk that was going on, typical Johnson stuff, but the Old Man didn't seem to mind at all. As a matter of fact, he was smiling and only giving Johnson half of his attention. The rest of it was on Stacey who was booming down back to the pits.

That was just another screwy thing in a trail of screwy events, because in any other race the Old Man would get as mad as a hornet if Scud even looked at him. But now he stood there listening, and smiling faintly, and even saying something now and then. It didn't make sense; none of it did.

Things began to liven up then, because Stacey wheeled the *Comet* into the pits and climbed out onto the low wooden pier. And right away Scud lit into him.

I wanted to get down there. I wanted to hear Scud talk—but no, Big Jim and me were exiles, out of range on the top of the *Comet's* trailer. I couldn't hear, but I could see Scud's glowering face, and I could imagine what he was saying—just about what Big Jim and me had been thinking all along, that Art Stacey was an old derelict who should have stayed down south where the sun would keep his bones warm, that he should have known better than to stick his skinny nose into a match race with Scud Johnson.

Scud wheeled about to include the Old Man in his tirade, alluding no doubt, to Haley's sad mental state in letting an old gaffer like Stacey drive the *Comet*.

But the Old Man didn't say a thing. He just smiled. And so did Stacey, only Art's smile was kind of vague, as though he didn't quite understand what was going on.

Scud stopped for a minute, just standing there, bowed head and shoulders over Stacey, scowling and out of breath, probably wondering why Stacey hadn't wilted right down into his shoes. But Stacey didn't do that. He did something else. He held out his hand. He wanted to shake with Scud.

Scud straightened up like his mind had come unhinged, and he jumped back as though Stacey was wearing a Borgia poison ring on that hand. And in so doing, he slipped on a wet plank and flopped flat on the pier. The five-minute gun slammed across the water.

THEY bellowed out of the pits together, the *Comet* flinging that white, foaming wake high into the air, and Scud's boat not looking like any slouch either. They

both circled down near the pits, waiting for the one-minute gun, and with a clear view of the starting clock up on the committee barge.

Right then I felt sorry for the *Comet*, circling out there, innocent and beautiful, at the mercy of an old goat who didn't even know he was beaten.

They turned toward the line on the one-minute gun, and I saw the large, black second hand begin to sweep across the face of the clock. The note of the engines was higher, and the broad wakes flattened across the water as the boats picked up speed, thundering for the line.

They crossed it right on zero, hitting up toward eighty-five miles an hour, Scud slightly in the lead, with the *Comet* riding close. They hit the first turn that way and blew out fast on the other side, throwing the shimmering spray far up in the sunlight.

From the trailer, I could see them growing larger as they roared down toward the pits, Scud still leading, but the *Comet* hanging in there. They slanted into the near turn and I got a look at Stacey as he followed Scud through to the other side. He sat in the cockpit easy, as though he were rocking on some front porch. He didn't seem to care that he was driving against the great Scud Johnson, that he was already beaten. It was just like mining coal for him, or sawing wood—all in a day's work. He just didn't seem to give a damn.

And then a strange thing happened. Scud began to get erratic. I could see it in the way his boat fish-tailed now and then when he turned to look at Stacey. It seemed as though he knew that Stacey didn't give a damn, as though he was worried that his big mouth had mis-fired in the pits before the race.

It had mis-fired, but I didn't know how. I hadn't seen anything like that before. They generally fell apart before Scud Johnson, and why Art Stacey didn't was just another thing I didn't see.

But I forgot all about that then, because it suddenly became a race. Scud slid wide on the far turn and lost a lot of ground. And the *Comet* closed up to him, and rode his wake down the stretch. Stacey followed like a hound, and all the way down to the near turn Scud kept turning his head and looking, as though he couldn't quite believe what he saw. And that's how he missed the turn.

Scud missed the turn completely. He was so busy watching the *Comet* that he roared right past the buoy, leaving a fat gap, and Stacey hammered through throwing spray in Scud's face, and jumping into the lead.

I nearly fell off the trailer then, because it was Stacey's race all the way. He went pounding around to the final gun, with the *Comet* shouting a victory song, and Scud five lengths behind.

Down in the pits, Old Man Haley was sitting on a fuel can, smug and smiling, looking as though he knew it would happen all along. And I guess he did, because when Stacey wheeled into the pits, happy and grinning, I saw the damndest thing I ever saw in my life.

He climbed up on the pier and I saw the Old Man fish a little brown-colored box out of his pocket which Stacey hung around his neck. And then I knew that Old Man Haley had all the angles, and I knew too why Scud Johnson had lost his race. He'd lost it because his big mouth hadn't carried him through, because Stacey hadn't heard a word he'd said. Without that hearing aid, Art Stacey was stone deaf.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

MUD on their tails.

Query:—I am having a discussion regarding beaver with a hard-headed Irishman and would like your opinion.

I claim beaver do not haul mud on their tails.

Also that they "wring" or twist out of traps and do not chew their leg off.

My friend is a pretty good guy, but he has been reading too many Nature Fakers.

—Hamilton L. McNichol
Oscoda, Michigan

Reply by Raymond S. Spears:—Apparently you are right as regards beaver transporting mud on their tails. In "Fur-Bearing Mammals of California," p. 665 I find—

"The house was visited at the time (November 11, 1920), when the mud coat was being applied. Tracks indicated that the soft, semi-liquid mud had been gathered up and held between the front paws and the chin, and that the beaver had then slid forward on its belly, propelling itself up the bank by its strong hind legs and feet. From points where the mud had been obtained well-worn trails led up onto the roof of the lodge." On p. 643 an old beaver working is described—"Twice he scooped up mud between his forepaws and his chin and plastered over the breaks."

Brush, branches, vegetation carried by beaver is held in the jaws. In swimming the forelegs, if holding materials, are not used—only the hindlegs to propel and the tail to steer (perhaps to scull, too).

The idea of transporting mud on tails comes, apparently, from the fact that beaver sit on their hind legs and tail. And thus in muck the tail gets muddy and leaves a muddy wake behind.

I think the "hard-headed" Irishman has seen pictures in children's unnatural history books showing beaver carrying mud on their tails (and the tails perhaps—out of all proportion—too big).

As for what trapped beaver do; they do wring and twist free of traps, leaving toenails, parts of paws, fore and hind paws and some of legs in traps. But trappers have reported finding paws torn by teeth beyond the trap jaws, as if the foot had become numb.

We cannot be too sure that animals do or don't do things. Carrying mud on the tail is just possible. In water the tail is a rudder; it is tilted sideways to offset the side-swing in towing a big branch; it is used in signalling (smacking the water). It is a "third leg" when cutting a tree or sitting up. There is a regional difference in beaver species' abilities, just as northern foxes are brighter than southern.

The late Ernest Thompson Seton was called a Nature Faker, when as a matter of fact he knew more by far than his detractors. Seton says, "the beaver does not use its tail as a trowel"—that is handling mud. There is no better authority.

GREASE for Minie balls.

Query:—Can you suggest a formula for a bullet lubricant for .58 Minie balls. I want to use them in a Harper's Ferry rifled musket. I bought some bullets from a chap in Vermont that came lubricated and they made nice groups at 200 yds. but those I cast myself and grease with tallow and beeswax won't hit

the side of a barn. I'm sure I don't have the proper grease and will appreciate any suggestions.

—R. E. Ware
Clemson Agricultural College
Clemson, S. C.

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—While I have never used the naked lead bullet in the muzzle loading rifles, I have done so with the Colt and Remington cap-and-ball revolvers of frontier days, and got good results.

My loose-load rifle shooting has been done with the patched ball in my Kentucky rifle of course, greasing the linen patch with beef tallow. I have had excellent results. But, I am of the opinion that you may be using too hard a lubricant on the old Minie ball. Have you tried good soft beef tallow on them?

Captain Tinney (who writes the shotgun information for *Ask Adventure*, a close friend and associate of mine) uses heavy water-pump grease for the patching on his muzzleloaders, I know, and he is certainly proficient with those old-timers. With black powder, the main thing of course, is to keep the fouling moist, you know. And I fancy either pure tallow, unmixed with the beeswax, or the heavy water-pump grease, from any auto supply house, will be about what you need.

BERDAN'S Sharpshooters.

Query:—I wonder if you could give me some information about a Civil War regiment known as Berdan's Sharpshooters. I understand that the regiment was raised in Illinois but was not restricted to natives of that state, that a man had to qualify as an expert rifleman to join and that it was equipped with repeating Sharps rifles.

I am interested in any and all information about this unit and its C.O.—Col. Berdan. Could you tell me something about its activation, numerical strength, caliber of the rifles and battle history? I would also appreciate a listing of any reference material.

—Walter R. Marsden
2869 Grand Concourse
New York 58, N. Y.

Reply by R. G. Emery:—I could write you a book about Berdan's Sharpshooters. As you see by the appended bibliography, which I am sure is by no means complete, a number of gentlemen have.

So I am afraid I will have to limit myself to the factual answers to your questions, as best I can, and leave it to you to fill in from the reference works which I have listed.

First, Colonel Berdan: Hiram Berdan was born at Plymouth in 1823. He lived most of his life around Rochester, N. Y., and died at Washington in 1893. He was an inventor; one of his most important accomplishments having been his work on a breech-loading rifle. He also is said to have invented the percussion cap.

There is a good deal of disagreement on the question of the arm with which the Sharpshooters were equipped. One account is to the effect that they were issued the Berdan rifle. That is, that Colonel Berdan furnished his own rifle in sufficient quantity to qualify the outfit for muster, at $60 per rifle. I do not know. It seems plausible, but I also am quite sure that he made a considerable effort to get the Sharps for them. I say it is plausible because the record also shows that he won a case against the Gov't, in 1888, for infringement on his patents in the manufacture of the breech-loading Springfield, to the tune of $100,000. Come to think of it, from '64 to '87, he was in Russia, supervising the manufacture of his Berdan rifle for the Russian armies.

Berdan says somewhere, himself, that his efforts to get the Sharps was tantamount to a 'declaration of war' on the War Department. Also there is one account of some companies getting the Sharps. I think, anyway, that at least 2 companies had muzzle loading, single shot, globesight, Springfields. The rest had Sharps and Berdans. No muskets. Knowing the inclination of the military staff mind, traditionalism, I can well believe it. Furthermore, while there has always been a good deal of controversy over the origin of the word 'sharpshooter,' I personally am convinced, in spite of arguments to the contrary—arguments, not evidence—that it was born with the advent of the Sharps rifle.

The regiment was accepted by the Secretary of War on June 15, 1861. Place of muster was designated as Weehawken, N. J. The First Regiment was completed during the following winter, at the Camp of Instruction at Washington, with about 1,000 men and officers.

States furnishing companies:

New York, 4, (A, B, D & H)
Michigan, 3, (C, I, K)
New Hampshire, E
Vermont, F
Wisconsin, G

The Second Regiment came in sometime later. States:

Minnesota, A
Michigan, B
Pennsylvania, C
Maine, D
Vermont, E & H
New Hampshire, F & G

By the way, I am unable to discover where Illinois ever had any connection with the outfit.

The standard of marksmanship which each man had to meet was a 10-shot possible at 200 yards, in a 10-inch bull. They phrased it another way, too . . . "a string measurement of the ten shots must not exceed 50 inches". Your guess is as good as mine as to what they actually meant. Possibly a ten-inch group, at 200.

They were uniformed in dark green jackets, caps and trousers (after they threw away the light blue ones which the Army could not see any kind of infantryman going without.) The color was probably a result of jaeger tradition. In fact, the regiments were often called the "Green-coats."

Listing their battle honors is something of a

problem. The record shows over 70 engagements, all I believe, with the Army of the Potomac, from Mechanicsville on. In fact, I don't think they missed a one. The reason was this: After they had once proved their worth, they were split up by companies and assigned to various divisions. They had a very special employment. The Confederate artillery was a good deal more gallant than efficient. They had many battery commanders who had been ruined by the tradition of the paladin, Pelham. They loved to fight their batteries point blank, in the line with their infantry.

In such situations, nothing I suppose could be much more discouraging to hard-working gunners than to have a detachment of snipers working them over from rifle-pits, a hundred or so yards away. Union commanders in the Civil War were not too famous for using their heads but in their tactical handling of the Sharpshooters, I believe they generally did.

Now, the bibliography: In addition to the general histories, biographical dictionaries and such, I would recommend the following:

Stevens, C. A., *Berdan's United States Sharpshooters,* Price-McGill, St. Paul, Minn., 1892.

Shreve, W. P. *The Story of the Third Army Corps,* Boston, 1910.

Scott, Robert N., *The War of the Rebellion, Official Records,* Washington, D.C. Gov't Printing Office, 1889.

Blake, H., *Three Years in the Army of the Potomac,* Lee & Shepherd, Boston, 1865.

There are a good many others, of course, but it all becomes pretty repetitious after awhile.

MICA WORMS.

Query:—What can you tell me about vermiculite? I have been unable to obtain any information about its value, possible uses, etc.

—John G. Cull
San Angelo, Texas.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—Vermiculite is one of the numerous forms of mica. Chemically, it is a hydrous silicate derived from the alteration of mica. Its composition has been known for some time, but it has had no commercial use until relatively recent years; in fact, it has had so little use that only recent editions of textbooks on mineralogy mention it at all, and in the usual lists of commercial minerals its market price is not included. So, it's not surprising that you couldn't learn about it.

This mineral takes its name from the Latin word "vermis" meaning worm-like. We get the word "vermiform" from the same root. And its name has been derived from the peculiar fact that under heat and moisture it expands enormously in size, taking a peculiar worm-like form as its expansion is in a linear direction along its axis.

Its principal commercial use at present is as an insulating medium for buildings, stuffed in between walls, over ceilings and beneath floors. It is claimed to be one of the best of such insulators. My files do not include its price, although I understand it is cheaper than other material employed for this purpose. It is also used as an aggregate (like sand) in making a light-weight concrete; also as a pigment in paints; as one constituent for plastics, rubber (synthetic); greases, bearings, and gaskets. So you see there is quite a varied market and no doubt a good demand.

H. G. Lashinger treats of vermiculite in an article in the *Mining Journal,* Vol. No. 222 (1944) published in London.

HUNTING the Hudson's Bay Barren Lands.

Query:—My son, an Ordnance Tech Sergeant in the U. S. Army, expects to spend several months this winter at Fort Churchill in Northeast Manitoba. From about January 1st to March 31st inclusive, in connection with some cold weather Ordnance tests.

He would like to know if there is any chance of doing a little big game hunting in that vicinity during those months. What game restrictions there are. The cost of a hunting license. From whom it can be obtained. What game is available there at that time of the year, etc.

He would also appreciate your advice on what weapons to take. He has a number of high-powered rifles from which to choose, including .30 S. Remington, .300 Magnum, .22 Varminter, and several others, all scope-sighted, the Magnum and Varminter with 20 Power Targetspots. His pistols include Hi-Standard, Lugers, Colt Automatics, etc. His best shotguns are a 12-gauge Browning Automatic, and a pump-action .410. He also has a converted over-and-under Ranger with a .30 caliber rifle on top, and 12-gauge shotgun underneath.

He used the .30 S. Remington in the Hartz Mountains in Germany in the closing days of the war. With three other GI's, he accounted for seven of the nine deer they brought in during a temporary ration shortage. So he is not without hunting experience, though he has never hunted really big game. Your advice would be greatly appreciated.

—F. B. Conway
28 Maravista Road,
Worcester 6, Mass.

Reply by Philip H. Godsell:—I happen to know that country from long experience, since I landed at Fort Churchill back in 1906 from the Hudson's Bay Co. ship *The Pelican* and lived five years around Hudson Bay. At that time it was still necessary to post sentries at Churchill when the Eskimos came in with their furs, to prevent them from crawling on the lead roofs at night and stealing lead from them for bullets for their muzzle-loaders. There was only a handful of white men there in those days, which included Factor Boucher of the Hudson's Bay Company and a small staff of North West Mounted Police, who were taking over from the H.B.C. the control of that region, actually surrendered with their charter in 1870 but still literally ruled by the

Company. At that time Fort Churchill was —apart from Fort MacPherson down the Mackenzie—the last outpost 'twixt civilization and the Pole, and was one of the clearing-houses for the hides of the now almost extinct musk-oxen. Even then the hunting of them was illegal, but there was no one to enforce the law till the Mounties arrived and seized eighty skins in the Company's possession. There are very few musk-oxen left—approximately 500 on the mainland northwest of Churchill, between the Thelon River and the Arctic coast, but nobody's allowed to hunt them.

The game there consists of caribou and polar bears, with geese and ducks in the spring, and ptarmigan at all times (white partridge) also seal and white whales (porpoises), the latter spouting right up the harbor in the summer time. You travel to Churchill by the Hudson Bay Railway from Winnipeg, via The Pas, travel through the so-called Land of Little Sticks till you reach Mile 487 (Herchmer) when you enter the Barren Lands—an area of rocks, caribou-moss and ponds which extends northward to the Arctic coast, and in which the present town of Churchill is situated.

Since most of the game can be shot at a considerable distance any hard-hitting rifle with a good range will be O.K. The natives favour the .30-30 Winchester as they are poor long distance shots. Caribou are to be found in the vicinity of Churchill almost any time, but are inclined to hit the scrub timber in the cold weather (November) then commence their northward migration in the spring (March). I have known the "Muskeg Limited"—as the H. B. Ry. train is called—to be held up for hours due to the enormous numbers of migrating caribou crossing the tracks. But the caribou are, as the Indians say, "here today and nowhere tomorrow."

I've known polar bears to enter the environs of the small town of Churchill, and they're frequently encountered along the Hudson Bay coast, north and south of there, especially in summer. In August, the mating season, they're apt to swim from far out at sea to investigate the twinkle of a campfire, or anything that excites their curiosity. They are very cunning, but not keen-sighted and are fairly easily killed so long as you don't shoot them in the head, on account of the massive bone structure of the skull and sloping forehead. As a matter of fact I've killed three of them at different times, once within the palisades at York Factory (south of Churchill) where one of them was attracted by the odor of seal-meat in the blubber-house. One paw weighed 28 pounds.

Seal are also found in considerable numbers in the harbor and along the coast at Churchill, but they've the annoying faculty of sinking the moment they're mortally wounded. They are of course the hair-seal, and not the valuable fur-seal. Walrus are found north of Churchill, near Marble Island and Southampton Island.

The ruins of the big stone fortress, Fort Prince of Wales, still overshadows Churchill harbor across the river from the town. It took the Hudson's Bay Company thirty years to build it and it was considered second only to Quebec and Louisbourg in strength with its forty-foot walls of quarried rock; yet it surrendered in an hour to Admiral La Perouse and his three frigates and stands a monument to a glory almost forgotten, its 42 cannon lying, till recently, where they'd been thrown when French soldiers attempted to dismantle the fort.

There's quite a story behind Churchill, which now has a 2½ million bushel elevator and was visited by six or more grain-carriers this summer. In winter it's one of the coldest and bleakest places I know of, due to frequent winds and the damp air and rime from the unfrozen Bay. In summer, mosquitoes and sand-flies are bad. There are two, and sometimes three, trains a week linking Churchill with the rest of civilization.

I am sorry to have to repeat, however, that your son has missed out on his big game hunting this season. The season opened November 24 and closed December 4.

As regards the licensing of a member of the United States Forces stationed at Churchill, I would advise that by arrangement with the Officer Commanding, Canada is issuing a stated number of licenses to personnel of the Military establishment, whether Canadian or American, at the regular resident fee. The matter of who receives these licenses is left to the Officer Commanding or his Adjutant, and anyone presenting a chit from him to the R.C.M. Police at Churchill is issued a license.

In regard to the automatic shotguns, these are entirely prohibited in Manitoba. A pump action shotgun is permitted however, provided that it is permanently plugged to take not more than two shells in the magazine.

TO become an Anti-narcotics Agent.

Query:—What are the qualifications and how do I apply for a position in the Narcotics Bureau?

—Jon C. Kindschi
Oceanside, Calif.

Reply by Francis A. Bent:—Antinarcotic Agents must be citizens of the U. S.; between 21 and 34 years of age, inclusive; 20/40 vision in each eye without glasses; hearing 15 feet each ear; well proportioned as to height and weight; have (a) at least 3 years' full-tipe paid experience in investigation of major criminal activities, or (b) be a graduate from a recognized school of medicine or pharmacy and have 1 year experience subsequent to graduation with an additional year in criminal investigation, or (c) be a graduate of a recognized law school with a bachelor's degree, plus 1 year full-time experience in criminal investigation. These positions are under Civil Service.

SASKATCHEWANDERLUST?

Query:—What can you tell me of the climate, altitude, growing season, rainfall, hunting, trapping, lakes and rivers of Saskatchewan?

—A. H. Williams
P. O. Box 91
Encino, New Mexico.

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp—You do not state the exact locality you are referring to; so I will have to answer them, generally, as best I am able.

You must understand that Prince Albert is situated on the North Saskatchewan River, and after you pass through a strip of farming country for about twenty miles, the wilderness —or "North" if you prefer it—begins. However, the temperatures and rainfall of the Prince Albert district prevail pretty much throughout the immediate north; so a report on one should cover the other.

Now for your enquiries:

CLIMATE. This is, by courtesy, referred to as "temperature." Meaning to say anything from 50 or 60 degrees below zero in the winter to 90 in the summer. 90 above, that is! Last winter the lowest recorded was 48 below, but the weather is generally pretty streaky. Thus, we had a cold snap before Christmas with the thermometer down to 40 below, a mild January, more cold and windy weather in February, and today it is above freezing. However, as we never look for spring much before the 15th of April, anything can happen yet.

ALTITUDE. Our altitude here is 1414 feet above sea level. Fifty miles north of the city is a Height of Land. Southwards of this, the rivers and creeks drain into the Saskatchewan River; northwards, they flow to the Churchill. Hence, I would imagine that the Churchill is about the same altitude as ourselves.

GROWING SEASON. Some ardent gardeners start as soon as the snow leaves the ground, towards the end of April, but there is always the risk of frost. As the leaves come out around the middle of May, that, I suppose, should be called the start of the growing season. And we don't trust the weather much after the first of September, with freeze-up occurring about the end of October.

RAINFALL. It would be necessary to hold up this reply while I got this information for you. But suffice it to say that the rainfall is normal. We have no "rainy season" but hope to get enough rain to keep crops growing. The past few years have been drouthy—with the southern part of the Province being hard hit—but there was an improvement last year. With the extra-heavy snowfall of this winter around here, we are hoping that the dry spell has come definitely to an end and that normal precipitation will follow.

HUNTING. This used to be one of those "sportsman's paradises" you read about, but of late the big-game has been going down. Timber wolves are mainly responsible; and these brutes are beginning to become so bold that it is not infrequent that we hear of them coming close to the city and killing stock. The game runs to moose, elk, flag-tail and mule deer, and, a bit further north, cariboo. There is some talk of the big-game season being closed this year. Definitely, something will have to be done about the timber-wolf menace.

TRAPPING. In the rabbit-years, Northern Saskatchewan offers the best trapping anywhere. Nowadays the low ebb of rabbits is on, with a noticeable falling off in foxes, lynx and other fur-bearers that depend on the lowly rabbit for food. Trapping in the immediate district isn't so much, and in the real north, the trapping laws are pretty stringent. Licenses are only issued to British subjects who have had five years' residence in that part of the country immediately prior to making an application for a license. This to protect fur and ensure a livelihood for the Indian.

LAKES AND RIVERS. This country is shot full of lakes, and the further north you go, the more water you run into. North of the Churchill land and water share the terrain in about a 50-50 proportion.

Some years ago we visited in northern New Mexico, up at Tecolotenos, north of Las Vegas. There I could well imagine myself in this country again. That is, except for the mountains. The vegetation was the same, and the squirrels, chipmunks, etc. made me feel quite at home. So if you're acquainted with that part of your State, you'll know what our country looks like. We don't have the mountains here, but when you're out hunting in a foot or so of snow, our hills are plenty tall enough.

TOMIGOFF.

Query:—Will you please give me any available information on the bushmaster snake? Where found? Color? Size? Is it known by any other name?

—Mrs. Oma Wells
Silsbee, Texas.

Reply by Clifford H. Pope:—The bushmaster is a highly dangerous snake which is found in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Guianas where it frequents forests, hiding often in abandoned mammal burrows. Although it is said to attain a length of eleven feet and some inches an adult snake averages about eight feet.

Its ground, or belly, color is light brown of a more or less pinkish hue and the conspicuous black blotches of its back are wide in the middle, narrow on the sides. This pattern makes a bushmaster coiled on the forest floor anything but conspicuous. The young are produced from eggs, the clutch numbering about ten, each approximately three and a quarter inches long. Bushmasters are delicate snakes in captivity and seldom find their way to zoölogical gardens.

Its scientific name is *Lachesis muta;* a common name sometimes applied to it is "Tomigoff."

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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SPORTS AND HOBBIES

American Folklore and Legend: *Songs, dances, regional customs; African survivals, religious sects; voodoo*—HAROLD PREECE, c/o *Adventure.*

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Auto Racing—WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT, 4828 N. Elkhart Ave., Milwaukee 1, Wis.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, c/o *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St. Matawan, N. J..

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, c/o *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Fishing, Fresh water: *Fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, c/o *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournaments—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, c/o *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, Timberlane Farm, R 2-Box 364, Racine, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, c/o *Adventure.*

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *American and Foreign*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: *American and foreign, wing shooting and field trials*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, New Jersey.

Skiing—WILLIAM C. CLAPP. The Mountain Book Shop, North Conway, N. H.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, c/o *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure.*

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, c/o *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESENBERG, c/o *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, U.S.A. Ret., c/o *Adventure*.

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C.R., c/o *Adventure*.

United States Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEVER, U.S.N., Ret., Box 74, Del Mar, Calif.

Merchant Marine—KERMIT W. SALYER, c/o *Adventure*.

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, c/o *Adventure*.

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure*.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGES SURDEZ, c/o *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, c/o *Adventure*.

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—CARL J. KUNE, P.O. Box 584, Canoga Park, Calif.

★**Madagascar** RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACGREGOR, care of *Adventure*. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1 ★*The British Isles*—THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England. **2** *Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, c/o *Adventure*.

★**Central America**—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, Clasificador 466, Santiago, Chile.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*. **2** ★*Argentina*—ALLISON WILLIAMS BUNKLEY, care of *Adventure*. **3** ★*Brazil*—ARTHUR J. BURKS, c/o Alto Tapajos, Rua Gaspar Viana 18, Belem, Para, Brazil.

West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, c/o *Adventure*.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, c/o *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure*.

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, c/o *Adventure*.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITAKER, 2908 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure*. **3** ★ *West Coast beginning with State of Sinaloa; Central and Southern Mexico including Tabasco and Chiapas*—WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Club Americano, Bolivar 31, Mexico, D.F.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **2** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada. **3** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario; National Parks Camping*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd., Toronto, Ont., Can. **4** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*— H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St. E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Western Arctic*—PHILIP H. GODSELL, F.R.G.S., General Delivery, Airdrie, Alberta, Canada.

Alaska—FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE, c/o *Adventure*.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **2** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1321 E. Tijeras Ave., Albuquerque, New Mexico. **3** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED EGELSTON, P.O. Box 297, Elko, Nev. **4** *Idaho and environs* R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **5** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Arizona Stockman*, Arizona Title Bldg., Phoenix, Ariz. **6** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITAKER, 2093 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 1 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh 5, Penna. **2** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 716 Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Ingelwood, Calif. **4** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG, LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **5** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 8)

At length, after many months as an Aviation Cadet, I was duly commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Corps, and sent to England where I flew with the Eighth Air Force as a bombardier and later as navigator. In time I was mustered out, and returning to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, my present home, I began an eighteen month stint as a salesman and copywriter with an advertising agency.

In time, however, this activity palled and so, on a July day last summer, when my wife appeared in a particularly jocular mood, I broached the subject of full-time writing. Being sometimes enchanted by deeds of derring-do, and having an admiration for my quixotic valor, she agreed—wholeheartedly, I might say. Wonderful things, these wives.

Because speedboat racing has always been a source of fascination to me I have, in the prewar years, spent many summers chasing around to the regattas in the mid-west circuit. There were times when I was able to afford my own boat. Times when I was not, I could occasionally prevail upon someone to let me drive an extra.

"The Bottom of the Barrel" is reminiscent of a character I once knew who had been with racing a good deal of his life. There was very little that was spectacular about him or his driving. He had no flair, no flourish, and yet he was one of the most consistent drivers I have ever seen. He was of the old school and regarded by many as something in the way of a grandfather to the sport. With the coming of new blood and new equipment he at length took a back seat to the youngsters. The last time I saw him drive was in 1941, a few months before the war. He had been prevailed upon to come out of his retirement for one last fling at the "waterbugs." An old man in a borrowed boat, he won handily, in a race with kids less than half his age and where there were few holds barred.

AND Robert J. McCaig, whose "Test of Power" you'll find on page 80, fuels our *Camp-Fire* with the following—

In comparison with many of the members of the noble company of *Adventure* writers, my background is almost boringly prosaic. I've never rounded the Horn in a wind-jammer, nor served as Oasis Correspondent with the Foreign Legion. Born in Seattle, Washington, during the panic year, 1907, I left that wooded clime for Montana at the age of six. Nine years later I finished high school, only to learn that my precocity merely meant that many more years of work.

Three years in a department store convinced me that the merchandising world had too many tycoons already, and I went to work for a large electric company. Twenty-two years later I am still there. And Carcassonne is still beyond the hill.

But that many years in the operating department of a big power system can give a person just as many gray hairs as any other career, and more than the usual number of glimpses of the comic and tragic sides of life. While I had been making desultory passes at writing since the age of seven, it was only in the past few years that I began using the colorful utility business as a background for fiction.

Naturally I soon found out that writing a report which would win approval of $195,000 or so for a new transmission line was entirely different from writing a story which anyone wanted to buy. Gradually, I attained a measure of success, but no acceptance could be more cheering than an invitation to join the *Camp-Fire* circle.

While my thirties have vanished in the recent past, I still have most of my teeth and some of my hair, though the latter is somewhat thinned from bumping into stone walls. I am still single, probably for the same reason that I find it distinctly encouraging that *Adventure* does not print pictures of its writers.

As for "Test of Power," helicopter patrol of transmission lines is now in the experimental stage. Whether the "windmills" can overcome the difficulties of mountain patrols, and fly low enough and slow enough to pick up a flashed-over insulator will soon be a matter of record. Planes have proven very useful under some conditions, but at their slowest they still make too many miles to locate the fine details of some power-line troubles.

"Pop" is of course completely fictional, but his spirit of independence is characteristic of workmen in this business. Most of them have a distinctive flair for individualism. Maybe it is the daily association with sudden, silent death, but give one of them a curt order or directive, and he is likely to bow his neck until a more diplomatic approach is indicated. As a group, I don't think there is any finer bunch of men in any industry.

The real test comes on a wild night when lines are kicking out like a row of dominoes, broken wires are arcing spurts of blue flame a yard long, and poles are snapping like matchsticks all over the system. You'll see the whole organization, from the General Super to the greenest grunt, from the system dispatcher to the newest oiler, tying into the trouble with every piece of equipment available. The public never knows the kind of near-miracles these men have to haywire together to get service back to the customers before said customers can shed more than a couple of buckets of tears!

MERLE CONSTINER, who's been absent from these pages far too long, (Nothing by him since "A Cannon for Mr. Bibbs" appeared way back in April '46.) sent us a wicked-looking Batangas knife at Christmas-time (on which we've only nicked ourselves thrice to date!) and enclosed the following succinct notation to accompany his tale on page 36.

I had a lot of fun writing "Louisville

Pistoleer". A great deal of the duelling stuff in it came from Sabine's "Notes on Duels and Duelling," Boston, 1855. The author finds it impossible to condemn duelling and says that our sympathy should fall instead to "the unhappy social position of the duellist." He says that almost all "successful duellists" feel remorse. In view of this, he says, "may not gentlemen in duelling communities be kindly asked, whether the Code of Honor ought now be abolished?" (The "Thirty-six Commandments" of the Clonmel Code, in force in 1855, were written in 1777!)

We don't know whether there's any hidden implication involved in the simultaneous presentation of the lethal weapon from the Philippines and his remarks in re the Code Duello but we're taking no risks and keeping the blade whetted just in case. No telling what sort of challenge an author may proffer an editor—swords or pistols at midnight; fountain pens and blue pencils at dawn. It pays to be prepared and we're girding ourselves accordingly!

WE THOUGHT you'd be interested, as we were, in the following communication from a reader in Central America apropos of Byron Dalrymple's article on wild-pig hunting, which we printed last spring, and the correspondence relating to it between the author and Mr. Uhl R. Kuhn which was printed in this department in the October issue.

Dear Campfire:—My *Adventure* for October just arrived, and as usual I turned to *Camp-Fire* the first thing. I always read *Camp-Fire* first, *Ask Adventure* next and then go on to the stories. I am very glad to see the interest being shown in the wild pig, javelina, peccary, (Indian name here "wari"). I live 150 miles from my postoffice address at Brus (English Brewer's) Lagoon at the mouth of the Patuca River. Most of this area is unexplored. It is a great wari country, I have seen herds that had well over 200 in them and several I estimated at over 300. There are several species, some being considerable larger than others. The name wari is only the larger kind.

They are very good eating, one of my favorite game meats, and there is nearly always some smoked on hand. The oil sack should be removed immediately or the meat will be a bit strong.

I have had at least a dozen as pets, in fact have one now. Their sight does not seem to be very good, but their scent is keen. They usually get cranky when they get older and most of them begin to kill chickens. All of the larger kind I have ever had had to be killed for this. The one I have at present is one of the medium-sized species, called locally "ca-kay-o" (I write it as it sounds). They make good watch dogs in so far as they run away all strange pigs, dogs, etc. Thinking to keep this one from getting mean I have altered him, and so far, at the age of one year he is still tame enough.

As to their being dangerous and attacking man—well, they do sometimes. I have seen one Indian that was chewed up by them. The Indians use dogs to keep them milling so they can make a larger kill and they chew up the dogs plenty. A good wari dog doesn't try to mix with them. It seems (at least so the Indians believe) that some herds are more dangerous than others. The wari on the Sicre River (this is another river that empties into Brus Lagoon) are considered the worst here. It may be that as there are no people living on this river they have not learned to fear humans there as much as in other places. It is believed here that even the jaguar leaves them alone, that a herd will kill a jaguar. That when he does go after a meal of wild pig he always takes the last one, that they never turn back. They travel many miles up and down the rivers, following the fruit seasons in different places. By the way, the larger turkey (I believe right name is curassow) follow the wari herds to feed in the ground they have rooted over. I have seen many times where a large herd has passed. They have a formation that is quite military. In the middle will be the tracks of the females and small pigs, sometimes the center of the trail will be chopped an inch or so deep, then further out the medium-sized boars, while the big old fighters will be well out on the flanks. It is always considered a good idea to be near a leaning tree that can be easily climbed, just in case, so Mr. Kuhn need not feel that he is alone in not wanting to start anything with them. They are seldom hunted here by lone hunters. When near a large herd and they take alarm and begin to grind those tusks, well, it is a very creepy sound, to say the least.

I think that the American sportsman has overlooked this game too long. Among the people of Central America he is considered very near, if not at the top, of the game animals. The Indians have more stories and legends about him than any other animal, with the exception of the tiger (jaguar).

I will be glad to answer any questions that any reader of *Adventure* may want to ask about this or any other information about Honduras, if I know the answer, that is. I have lived here since 1924.

—C. C. Cook
c/o J. N. Kawas y Hijos,
La Ceiba,
Rep. de Honduras, C.A.

Thanks, Brother Cook, for the interesting letter and for your extremely kind offer to furnish on-the-spot information covering your territory. We all appreciate it mightily!—K.S.W.

(Continued from page 93)

and he had to hold with one hand while he freed it with the other. Once he slipped back a few feet, and he gasped in relief as he managed to catch himself. For he knew that even if his rigging held through the slide, he would never have the strength to make a second climb.

Interminably he went on, hand over hand. His eyes smarted with dripping sweat, his lungs were on fire, and his arms were tearing out of their sockets. Suddenly, tipping his head back, he could see the south tower, only a few yards away. In a frantic burst of strength which drained the last of his resources, he pulled himself up the final few feet, and on the second try, clamped a hand on the cross-arm. How he reached the jumper, disconnected his gear, and made his way to a cross-member on the tower, he could never remember, for now his senses were spinning and his eyesight dim.

When his gasping lungs finally got their fill of air and his racing heart slowed down a little, he found himself braced against the steelwork of the tower, his safety securely fastened by pure instinct. Unsnapping it, he moved to the corner, and placing his feet carefully on the step bolts, made his way slowly to the ground—ground that was curiously firm and solid beneath his feet.

He wanted desperately to lie down and rest, but duty still drove him. He staggered through the snow to the nearest telephone pole, and untying his climbers from their bundle, he strapped them on. At the top of the short pole, he cut the wires on the canyon side, and clipped on the portable which had banged him so sorely in the ribs on the way across. As he put the receiver to his ear, he grunted in relief. The line was clear. He rang for Piegan and they tied him to Marston.

"Pop Fremont, at 920, Phil," he reported when the dispatcher answered.

"Boy, I'm glad to hear from you," said the dispatcher with relief in his voice. "Joe told me when I came on shift that they hadn't heard from you since one, and we were getting worried."

"Well, I made it. I wanta turn in, the line is fixed."

"What! Well, that's swell. Go ahead."

"Fremont releasing his clearance on the Skeleton Creek-Confederate Gulch section of the Coronado line. All grounds off, everybody in the clear, and the line is ready for operation."

The dispatcher repeated, and Pop described the trouble briefly. Then he continued, "Now, Phil, I know you want to get that line back quick, but that ain't all. The windmill went down in the loop of Devil's Canyon, and the pilot is hurt bad and Rand has a busted ankle. He wants the other pilot to fly in and pick 'em up right away. There's a clear space where he can land."

"Right away, Pop," agreed the dispatcher. "What else?"

"If they got room, better have Dr. Schmidt go along. Tell the pilot to watch out for the downdraft in the canyon. And tell him to get humpin', Lenhart's in bad shape. Now, I cut the phone line here, so you can't use it."

"O.K., Pop, I'll get on this stuff right away and get the dope from you later on in the day."

As the dispatcher hung up, Tip Marcus came on.

"The boys should be up to where you are in another hour, Pop. You wait there and they'll help you back. Say, you must have some story. Did you cross on the sheep trail?"

"Yeah, crossed on the sheep trail, snowslide took it out and I came back on the wire. Listen, Tip, I'm so damn tired if I don't get down offen this pole I'm gonna fall off."

"Probably wouldn't hurt you, Iron Man," said the supervisor, dryly. "Say, our friend Rand must be a pretty subdued individual."

"Rand's all right!" snapped Pop, with a heat that surprised even himself. "I think maybe Clint Rand is gonna make a hand yet. Now, I'm gettin' down from here, and I ain't gonna walk another step. I'm gonna wait for the boys right here. Be seein' you, Tip."

When Pop Fremont reached the ground, he found himself a seat on a rock outcropping bare of snow, and rolled a much-needed cigarette. As he blew out a lungful of smoke, he looked triumphantly out over the stark depths of Devil's Canyon, and remarked aloud, "Wonder if an old guy, sixty-three—sixty-four years old, could ever learn to run one o' them there heeliocopters?"

THE TRAIL AHEAD

They'll all be back next month—Johnny McQueen, Red-eye Jameson, Aasie Gowen, Morse Mixon and the rest—every last sourdough of the lot, plus a few chechakos thrown in for good measure, in another roaring yarn of Alaska today by the man who gave us "Home Is the Warrior" and other memorable tales of our last frontier.

"THUNDER IN THE NORTH"

By R. G. EMERY

—opens with a wind, straight off Bering Sea by way of Bristol Bay, plucking at the short hair on the nape of your neck with icicle fingers, as you crouch in an alder-and-willow thicket in the foothills of the Aleutian Range and line the sights of a cut-down .30-'06 on an Alaskan Brown only two sizes smaller than a house. Your hunting partners are Johnny McQueen and General Joe Douglas, G-2, U.S.A., who's flown all the way from his swivel chair in the Pentagon Building to get you to do a job for him and Uncle in the back-of-beyond northeast of the Noatak River country. You'll bag no brown bear and the only carcass you'll help lug back from the hunt will be the general's but you'll get a chance to fire at bigger game than any four-pawed brute before the story ends. There are bears that walk like men on the shores of Kotzebue Sound—even as on the borders of the Hindu Kush half a world away—and they're playing for keeps and not for fun!

Plus "Blue Fury"—a gripping story of the commercial swordfishing fleet that harpoons the waters off Catalina Island by JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS. . . . "Shadrach and Sin"—a fine tale of the great trail-drives of the '80's when the longhorn herds swarmed up from Texas by BENNETT FOSTER. . . . "Mr. Third Engineer"—a salty yarn of today's Merchant Marine and the discipline—and lack of it—that prevail aboard our cargo-carriers by ETHAN GRANT. . . . The next exciting installment of STEVE FRAZEE'S new serial of the Colorado goldmines—"Ghost-Mine Gold". . . . As well as a bulging overload of interesting articles, fact features, verse and informative department. A great issue, this APRIL—

ON SALE MARCH 12th

LOST TRAILS

NOTE. We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to locate my father, Dewey Chaves Shiver, born March 28, 1901, at Lincoln, New Mexico. Has not been heard from since August, 1930. He has lived in San Francisco, El Paso, and Florida. In El Paso, he lived on Cotton, Erie, and Copper streets. He was in the Navy in 1917-1921, enlisting at Roswell, New Mexico. Please get in touch with Bill Shiver, Box 818, Oklahoma City, Okla.

P. J. Ferriere, Box 163, Commack, N. Y., wants to hear from any surviving crew members of the U.S.S. *West Over*, Army Cargo and Supply ship, which was torpedoed and sunk in the Bay of Biscay on or about July 21st, 1918.

I would like to contact anyone who served on the LST 1033 during the time she was first commissioned until V-J day. H. L. Martin, Box 66, Ashland, W. Va.

I want address or information of my son, William (Bill) Andrew Clow; born at Carmen, Okla., Oct. 16, 1920. He is slightly deaf. Last heard of March 14, 1938 at Bellefontaine, Ohio. Said he was on way to Boston. Has lived at Cleo Springs, Okla. and El Centro, Calif. and towns in Arkansas. Please write Earl Clow, P.O. Box 684, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Will someone who was in Jap prison in Java from 1942 to 1944 who, perhaps, knew Seaman Moody C. Harrison, please write me. He was presumed to be lost when the Japs were moving him from Java in 1944. The ship was sunk by allies. C. L. Kitchens, 12 Maurice Ave., Simonsdale, Portsmouth, Va.

I will greatly appreciate contacting any of the following named men who were members of Troop D, 3rd U. S. Cavalry, stationed at Fort Assiniboine, Montana in the years 1903-1933—1st Lieut. Reginald McNally, (Com.), Sgt. Carl G. Day, Sgt. Lawrence Creekhaven, Egbert Ward, Corp. Nicholas Nusbaum, Thurston Thickston (Hosp. Corps), Pvt. Clyde R. Hess, Sam Standley, Clyde H. Shelmester, Ben C. Parrar or any other member of the above outfit. I hope to obtain information needed by the V.A. from the above. Please write Charles M. W. Burden, Box 128, Eddyville, Ky.

I would like to inquire about William Breese, Paul Dees, and Jakie Marlow with whom I served in the 12th Photo Section, France Field, Canal Zone. Please contact James C. Long, San. Eng., N. J. State Hospital, Greystone Park, N. J.

Roscoe Pinney, who served in the First World War with the 81st Toronto Battalion, wounded, gassed and shell-shocked, discharged June 1919 at Toronto. Last seen in Sheridan, Wyoming in 1920. Supposed to have been in Youngstown, Ohio in 1933. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please write his father, Guy C. Pinney, Sr., 490 Morningside St., North Long Beach, Calif.

Francis Charles Aitkens, R.C.A.F., would like news of John Dowrie (Mick) Roberts. He was born in Dublin about 1891, went overseas with the Canadian Artillery from Victoria October, 1915, and returned in 1921. He worked in Clinton, B.C., then was a storekeeper in Victoria. In 1926 he went to California where he worked at Petaluma. The last address was Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, in 1938. Please communicate with Sqdn. Ldr. F. C. Aitkens, Box L-160, R.M.D.4, Victoria, B.C. Canada.

I am anxious to contact my uncle, John Dunlop, native of Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia. He is of medium height, gray hair, and in his middle fifties, probably a salesman or an accountant. He was last seen in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1926. Charles Dunlop, 63 Pleasant St., Truro, Nova Scotia.

I would like to contact my buddy, Herbert C. Summers. We soldiered together with Co. C, 393rd Inf., 99 Div. I last saw him during the Battle of the Bulge, Dec. 16, 1944. His home is somewhere in Charleston, W. Virginia. Anyone knowing him please contact George O. Parker, 250 Columbia St., Cumberland, Md.

I am very interested in locating the following buddies of mine. We served in the 26th Regt., First Inf. Div., both in the states and the ETO; in England, Scotland, North Africa, and Sicily, where we were separated. S/Sgt. John Page, about 5′ 7″, 140 lbs., ruddy complexion, reddish brown wavy hair, square features, and about 33 years of age. Page is formerly of Jersey City, N. J. Sgt. George (Big George) Brighindi, 6′ 1″, 200 lbs., olive complexion, black wavy hair, plays guitar. He is from Bridgeport, Conn., about 29. T/Sgt. Arthur (Lippy) Lippman, dark complexion, black thinning wavy hair, about 5′ 6″, slender build, from New York City, is about 32 years old. Any information will be appreciated by Danny Monahan, 354 Water St., Leominster, Mass.

W. H. McCarty, 965 Clinton St., Napa, California wants information of his two brothers, A. W. McCarty, whose nickname is "Buck," and W. F. McCarty, sometimes called "Bill."

I am trying to locate my buddy, Norman Proper. He was on the *S. S. Minotaur, S. S. Matonian,* and the *S. S. Esso Baytown.* His hometown is Denver, Colo., and he is 6' 2" tall, weighing about 165 lbs. He has brown hair. He was last heard of in Port Aransas, Texas. William Quinn, 3314 Waterloo Place, Dallas, Texas.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur Micue or Matthews, please write N. F. Preo, 3000 S. Lawndale Ave., Chicago 23, Ill. He enlisted from Maine in the U. S. Army, served in Texas and Mexico with the cavalry against Villa about 1917-1918.

I would appreciate any help in finding George Van Denworker. He would be about 80 years old now. He raised my wife's father, George A. Van Denworker, along with three other boys, one of whom was his own. The family last heard from him in 1935 when he was in San Francisco. Please contact Laurence C. Buck, 317½ N. Maine St., Ellensburg, Washington.

Information wanted about Lt. Gene Manghi, O-1641540, 56th Signal Battalion, who wrote me from Czechoslovakia regarding my article on hybrid oak crop trees published in *Popular Science,* April, 1945. Any knowledge of him should be forwarded to Thomas Q. Mitchell, 1564 Broadway, New York, N. Y., c/o BILLBOARD.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of my son, Hercules McClain, veteran of World War I, last heard of at 519½ South Daley St., Los Angeles, Calif., engaged in landscape gardening at that time, 1932, please write to his brother, William D. Meeks, Apt. 1, 102 Palmetto Dr., Pasadena 4, Calif.

I want to contact Stephen Kolowski from Chicago who was on the Secretary of Navy's yacht and the Receiving Station in Washington. Also Joe Vieditch who was on the old Reuben James 245 in 1920—and William Jennings Bryan Guest from St. Louis who was on the old battleship, the New Jersey. Would also like to find William Wischehtch from the Naval Magazine in Coco Solo and Naval Air Station along with William Henry Hanna Hurst from New Orleans who was on the old Flusser 289 in 1920. Please write L. W. Fraser, CGM, USN, 16th Fleet Staff, Orange, Texas.

I would appreciate any information about Frank and Fred Reed of New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The last known of Frank, he was still in Pennsylvania and Fred was somewhere on the West Coast. Anyone knowing of either Frank's or Fred's whereabouts, please write to M. M. Mausser, R.F.D. No. 1, Bernard, Iowa.

I should like to locate Vernie Baldwin, 35 years old, lived in Live Oak and Jacksonville, Florida, in 1928 and early in the 30's. He is related to John Sterling and is the son of B. O. Baldwin. Please write J. E. Cross, P. O. Box 61, Live Oak, Fla.

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(Continued from page 71)

ment," said Sparhawk, "and you was finally caught on the wrong side of the fence!"

"There's no possible solution." McCargo kicked savagely at the Tabernacle platform.

"That kind of talk ain't what this country's built on!" Sparhawk pushed back his plug hat. "Sulphur and brimstone, man, I got forty-seven different solutions and I ain't hardly put a corner of my mind to the problem. Now, listen to me!"

McCargo listened. Bobolinks began to sing, the breeze came sweet with clover, and it turned out to be a wonderful day.

His Wellington boots trod air back to Strang's headquarters. At last he had the answer. His son would stay with him and once again the *Minong* would sail the lakes with a singing quartet.

"Hulda," he asked, and his voice trembled, "Hulda, if I promised you a very special cabin and the best of everything for the baby and five dollars more a month than the *Western World* has offered, would you sign aboard the *Minong* as cook?"

The girl wriggled one shoulder of the dress back on and the other down, changing the baby over with practiced ease. "Aye tank so," she murmured, and beamed down at McCargo's son.

"By Yumping Yimminy," marveled Hulda Roen Slogvig, "hay ess always so hongry, my Olaf!"

. . . Every time he wound up that yarn, old Cap Sparhawk's roar could be heard from the Steamboat Hotel in Detroit clear up to Georgian Bay. He busted three ribs once, just chuckling about it.

"What complicated things," he'd say, "was that, like all young cubs, McCargo never figured it worthwhile to pick up more than three words of any foreign language. The only Scandihoovian he knew was *Jag elskar dig*, which means exactly what you think it does."

Then he'd lean back in the deacon seat and take careful aim at the pot-bellied stove. "In a way, you know, McCargo was a lot like that King Strang, and *he* lost his crown all on account of a pair of lady's bloomers!" *Sp-urt!* "But that's another story!" *Sp-lash!*

THE END

(Continued from page 53)

a sort of balancing anchor for the tipped-up house. "How long has he got?"

"Five minutes," Coggins replied.

Something started to hurt like hell in my chest. I closed my eyes to keep from passing out, opened them to stare at the boom above. If the kingbolt was cut the cab would tip backwards, lift everything off like you uncap a bottle—if everything didn't crumple in a pile . . .

"Get the hell out of here," I told Coggins. Dick's eyes were inquiring. "Somebody has to cut it," I said. "I can't move."

He wet his lips, looked at the tangled steel forest above. "All right," he said.

He looked at the shiny, ground steel of the massive bolt, glanced nervously at the towering turning rail. Then he wriggled to where he could watch the tip.

There was no sound except the flat hiss as the flame spread on the smooth surface. I shut my eyes. Tried not to think what might happen if I had guessed wrong.

"I—I can't get it started," the youngster stammered.

"Puddle it! Puddle it! Dig the cone of the flame right in, to raise a sharp edge where you can start a cut!"

Then flaming, molten stars lit up the cab base. Only for an instant. There was a sharp crack as the torch back-fired, went out. Darkness and silence reigned.

A lighter scratched, brought soft blue light back again. The stars showered after a while, moved unsteadily from side to side like you spray a garden hose. Abruptly they moved downward and I cursed to myself. I knew what was coming even before the thread of the cut backed up and back-fired the torch again. Dick's voice had an edge of hysteria. "I can't get through—"

Johnny was breathing heavily as he dropped on the ground beside me. "I was just getting through the gate when I heard what happened. Who's up there?" He didn't wait for an answer, followed the twisting line of hose to the torch. Then I heard him say grimly, "Get out of here, son, before you have everything in a heap. Didn't anyone ever tell you not to cut strained iron from the bottom side up? It'll snap before you're halfway through."

He jumped back, took a swift look at the counterweight, at young Dud. He was flinging words over his shoulder as he

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moved back to position. "Get ready, Paul. If we slice it all the way through it may collapse the works. I'm going to cut it from the top, let it bend a little, mebbe enough to let you both slide out. Run like hell when I do. Mebbe it won't hold!"

The torch flared. But it had a different sound now. That soft sound of a perfect neutral flame. Johnny vanished up by the kingbolt. Silence. Then a triangle of sparks gilded the cab, flowed steadily.

Dripping blobs fell from the bottom of the cut with steady precision, splattering their golden shower as they hit the roadway. There was no hesitation in the stream or the triangle now. Only the steady wash of molten steel as the scalpel-keen jet of oxygen sliced. I turned my face sideways from the puddling sparks.

"Paul! In a minute now!"

"Now!" The golden shower ceased. Johnny was back, pulling frantically on Dud's shoulder. The cab groaned. Started tipping back in slow-motion. The boom lifted and I scuttled out, grabbed at Dud's leg. He was up, limp arm hanging.

"Run!" Johnny roared and dove for the hole. Somehow we all got through.

Steel clanged, shrieked scrapingly. Then everything fell in a heap. I fainted.

THE ROOM was white. I recognized it after a while as the Field Hospital. Breathing brought fiery knives stabbing my chest. Coggins stood by.

The three beds in the white room were occupied. I raised a little to see. The last bed was Johnny. I motioned toward him with my head. Coggins nodded. "Leg. Not bad. The whole damn thing collapsed and he didn't quite make it."

Dud had an arm that was plastered to three times its normal size. He was smoking a cigarette. He caught my gaze on his arm. "It'll be all right," he said, inhaling deeply. Then, after a while, "Paul?"

"Yeah."

"Dick, the boy from my school. He never even saw anything thicker than quarter-inch plate before."

Johnny's white thatch raised from the far bed. The noise of his movement turned our heads in his direction.

"I see what you meant, Johnny," Dud said softly. "It isn't all in a book. . ."

THE END

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